University of Alberta

A Commentary on Plato's *Menexenus*

By

Allison Greckol ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Political Science

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"So it is right for every man who remembers their deeds to exhort the children of these men, just as in war, not to leave the post of their ancestors or fall back and yield to vice"

This work is dedicated to my father, William Nicholas Greckol,
and my sister, Vonnie Ionne Greckol.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical commentary on Plato's *Menexenus*. It aims at showing that the dialogue is both a commentary on democracy, and a prescription for the reformation and improvement of democracy. If implemented, the dialogue's precepts would actually yield an aristocratic democracy, which is in fact a (fairly) strict meritocracy. This emphasis on merit as the only legitimate claim to rule serves as a shield against two eternal threats to all democracies, oligarchy and tyranny.

One aspect of this thesis is an examination of Aspasia's allegorical relationship with the muses, with particular attention to Hesiod's representation of them.

Finally, this work argues that the funeral oration is actually a disguised praise of Sparta. This latter point is then connected to the need to inculcate a pre-rational respect for moderation in a democratic citizenry.

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I would also like to express my thanks to Sue Collins for generously allowing me to use her unpublished translation, and the many helpful historical references I found in her notes.

A Note to the Reader

In referring to Plato's texts, I have stayed with the normal practice of citing the subdivided Stephanus page. I have also adopted the following convention. When a relevant piece of text extends beyond the Stephanus page where it first appears and into the following adjacent page, I will indicate that by using the appropriate letters as follows (e.g., 235ea refers to what is usually represented as 235e-236a).

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Introduction

1) Plato's *Menexenus*: Opening Comments
2) The Chapters
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Plato's *Menexenus*: Opening Comments

This thesis will argue that the *Menexenus* is intended to illustrate the kind of self-understanding a democracy ought to inculcate should it want to resist the threat of tyranny on the one hand, and oligarchy on the other. The barbarians constitute an additional, and continual, threat to both Athens and all the Greeks. In response to this threat, the oration Socrates recites urges her citizens to perceive themselves as the liberators of the Greeks. The inculcation of a moderate xenophobia against the barbarians, and foreigners generally, emerges as a key defensive measure in the service of protecting the Greek and/or Athenian ways.

The indirect presence of a courtesan in the dialogue reminds us that the historical Athens, Pericles' Athens, was a feverish city (cf. *Republic*, 372e) and the oration of the *Menexenus* is a comparatively practical solution to the ills of a feverish city. The *Menexenus*' mythology, which resembles a new founding in the guise of a mere renewal of tradition, aims at infusing the citizens' souls with a passionate, and in that respect, a pre-rational longing for moderation and fraternal affection. In doing so, it urges the city toward a healthier understanding of her civic life.

As many scholars have pointed out, the *Menexenus* is an unusual dialogue. For the most part, it does not seem to resemble a dialogue at all since the bulk of it is a single speech, ostensibly a "funeral oration" memorializing Athens' war dead. Therefore, reading the *Menexenus* is somewhat unlike reading other Platonic dialogues. In the first place, the reader is not prompted to thought by listening to Socrates and his interlocutor exchange questions and responses, since in the *Menexenus* there are few questions posed and even fewer are explicitly answered. The sight of the often censorious Socrates delivering what appears to be unqualified praise for his fellow countrymen and his city makes the dialogue appear all the more strange. There is no obvious way in which the oration constitutes a critical analysis of human things. Indeed, its tone is so grand, so poetical, and so charming, one could listen to it without questioning its accuracy or philosophical content at all – which is how, on the surface, Menexenus receives it. It is reasonable, then, for the reader to take the part of a questioning, challenging interlocutor, thereby hoping to glean something more substantial from Socrates' impressive display of rhetoric.

The *Menexenus* breaks naturally into three sections. The first section is an exchange between Socrates and Menexenus, which sets the stage for the second section, a funeral oration that constitutes the bulk of the dialogue. The author of this oration is, if we believe Socrates, "Aspasia the Milesian", but the oration is delivered to Menexenus by Socrates. Plato in turn delivers it to us in a rather ambiguous manner, initially emphasizing Aspasia's authorship, and later hinting that Menexenus at least harbors doubts regarding the true origin of the oration. The third section is a brief "closing exchange" between Socrates and Menexenus.

A note on the translation is in order. Primarily, I have relied on Sue Collins' translation, however, it has also been necessary to consult the Loeb on occasion, which will be indicated in the footnotes.[1]

The Chapters

Chapter I is an overview of the dialogue, following the dialogue's own chronology. That is, the chapter provides a general description of the dialogue's contents, along with a preliminary analysis of certain topics, in the order that they are raised by the text. I also draw our attention to numerous links between the funeral oration and the prescriptions for the 'city in logos' of Plato's *Republic*. Chapter I concludes with remarks about the oration's overall pattern.

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[1] Translated by R.G. Bury, for the Loeb Classical Library, Plato IX,USA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Chapter II begins with a consideration of the anachronisms as they pertain to my interpretation of Socrates' part in the dialogue. I will then take-up the question of who really composed the oration, and make the case for why it is doubtful that we are to suppose that Aspasia is really the author. This chapter will close with a discussion of the significance of the oration's ambiguous origin.

Chapter III begins with a discussion of Socrates as the author of the oration, and of the effects of funeral speeches upon him. I will then discuss the politics of the *Menexenus*, and the role of 'speech and deed' in the dialogue. I will next consider funeral speeches as such, and their exceptional capacity to affect an audience – thereafter I will discuss funeral orations and the transmission of virtue. Finally, I will address the *Menexenus'* regime, an aristocratic democracy, and its defense against tyranny and oligarchy.

Chapter IV will explore Aspasia's alleged authorship. I will present an interpretation of her role in the dialogue which likens her to the Muses.

Chapter V will discuss the oration's mythological presentation of Athens' history in connection with the *Republic*'s "Noble Lie".

Chapter VI will make the case that the oration in fact performs the harder rhetorical task that is mentioned in the 'opening exchange", that is, it implicitly praises Sparta to an Athenian audience. I will then discuss the oration's presentation of the interim between the Median wars and the Peloponnesian war.

Finally, I will turn to a consideration of the battles between Athens and Sparta.

The Title

One would expect a complete interpretation of the *Menexenus*[2] to explain its title – what is peculiar to Menexenus' character such that he is the eponym of the dialogue? While the two sets of exchanges between Socrates and Menexenus, (which frame the oration), are brief, they are nonetheless rich with information about Menexenus' character. For instance, we see in the opening exchange that he is familiar with Socrates and that he entertains some interest in things political. Although it is reasonable to assume the *Menexenus* contains all the information requisite to its interpretation - that is, we should assume that the *Menexenus* is a coherent whole unto itself - it may nonetheless be helpful to look cautiously to other dialogues for supplementary information.

Menexenus in Other Platonic Dialogues

Menexenus also appears in the *Lysis*; indeed, he plays a far more prominent speaking role there than in the *Menexenus*. In the *Lysis*, after a discussion between Menexenus and Socrates concerning friendship, Socrates comments: "And so, since I wished to give Menexenus a rest and was also pleased by that one's *love of wisdom*…".[3] Love of wisdom? In other words, *philosophy*? This is high praise coming from the philosopher.

---

[2] The word "Menexenus" itself could have some significance since it can be translated as "remains a stranger". This is notable because of the dialogue's emphasis on citizenship. Moreover, it is believed that one of Socrates' sons was named Menexenus, which, if nothing else, lends another layer of irony to the final part of the oration, which is a message from the war dead to their children, *via* Aspasia *via* Socrates. Finally, in the *Lysis*, we are informed that Menexenus' father's name was Demophon, that is, "voice of the people". This too seems to fit with the closing message from the fathers – as a group – to their sons (207b).

This sort of information is helpful to us because we may gather that Menexenus and Socrates have been acquainted since Menexenus' youth and that their relationship then was at the very least amicable. Furthermore, Menexenus also appears in the *Phaedo*, which suggests their association endured from the time of Menexenus' youth, as we see it in the *Lysis*, through their meeting in the *Menexenus*, until Socrates' death, as it is portrayed in the *Phaedo*. Although nothing of great importance can turn on this external information, it may help illuminate the text at hand. For example, if we consider the information noted above, it suggests Socrates holds a relatively high opinion of Menexenus; therefore, there is external textual support for interpreting the opening exchange of the *Menexenus* as playful banter rather than sarcastic admonishment, and for gleaning a hint of seriousness in Socrates' quip that Menexenus believes: "he has come to the end (tela) of education and philosophy" (234a). At the least, we can be confident that Menexenus is familiar with philosophy and sympathetic to the philosopher. Likewise, the longevity of the relationship between Socrates and Menexenus constitutes a compelling reason to believe Socrates is unusually well-disposed toward Menexenus. Phaedo refers to those men who were present at Socrates' death as "friends", a distinction which echoes the conclusion of the *Lysis,* where Socrates explicitly affirms that he considers himself to be "friends" with Menexenus and Lysis.[4] My interpretation of the *Menexenus* will thus be premised upon the view that Socrates and Menexenus enjoy a special relationship, perhaps even a friendship of sorts, that is enduring and genial.

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[3] Ibid., 213d.
[4] Ibid., 223b.

The Interpretive Complexities of the *Menexenus*' Setting

Initially, the setting of the dialogue appears straight forward, beginning with Socrates' reference to himself as one of the city's "elders", and to Menexenus as being "at such a young age" (234a). Soon, however, Socrates mentions his teacher Aspasia, who has produced "in addition to many other great rhetoricians, the one who is preeminent among the Greeks – Pericles, son of Xanthippus" (235e). This too seems unproblematic, until one notices that Socrates refers to Pericles in the present tense, which suggests that we are to read the dialogue as if Pericles is presently alive. This point creates for the reader the first of many anachronisms. The historical evidence indicates that there was never a period of time where all the following were true: Pericles was alive, Socrates was an elder, and Menexenus was alive.

Pericles delivered his funeral speech at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian war (431 B.C.) and died only two and a half years after the war began. If Pericles is alive at the time that the *Menexenus*' conversation takes place, then the suggestion would seem to be that the dialogue is set during this brief slice of time.[5] However, in 430 B.C. Socrates was roughly forty years old and thus he was hardly an "elder" while Pericles lived. Moreover, in the *Lysis*, where the setting of the dialogue is not problematic, Socrates refers to himself as an "old man" and Menexenus is portrayed as a youth, who is still accompanied by his father's attendents.[6] If, on this basis we set the *Lysis* sometime in the last decade(s) of Socrates' life, when he might justifiably refer to himself as an old man, then we must also see Menexenus as a youth in the decade immediately prior to 399 B.C. If this is so, then it is impossible for Menexenus to also have been a young man thirty years earlier while Pericles still lived - much less could he be older then than he was in the *Lysis*.[7]

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[5] Thucydides, II.65.
[6] *Lysis*, 223ab.

Nevertheless, in general I will approach the dialogue as if it were set after Pericles delivered his funeral speech, but while he still lived. This seems most fitting insofar as it provides an explanation for Menexenus' seeming familiarity with Pericles' speech and it is the first indication we get of when the dialogue is meant to be set, so it would seem to be a good place to start.[8]

Now, this does not solve many of our problems with respect to how 'time' figures in the dialogue. Although Pericles being alive sets the dialogue around 430 B.C., the oration also refers to numerous events that occurred well after Pericles died, and even more perplexing, it also refers to events that occurred well after *Socrates* died.[9] Thus, at the end of the oration Socrates is speaking of events he could not have actually witnessed because he was no longer alive. Whereas at the beginning of the dialogue it seems that Menexenus (portrayed as a young man) is situated in a historical time frame that occurred prior to his birth and thus (historically) he could not have witnessed the crucial event in question (i.e., Pericles' oration) because he was not yet born.

These 'time' issues present a series of interpretive challenges to any reader of the *Menexenus*. For instance, if we set the dialogue in 430 B.C., Socrates appears to recite the oration with an eerie foreknowledge of his trial and (various other events).

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[7] In the 'opening exchange' Socrates addresses Menexenus by his first name, whereas in the *Lysis* Socrates addresses him as "son of Demophon". This suggests that Menexenus is older in the *Menexenus* than he was in the *Lysis*, as does the fact that he was still accompanied by his father's servants in the *Lysis*, and travels alone in the *Menexenus*, attends the city assembly, etc.

[8] Evidenced by Menexenus' implicit recognition of what Socrates is referring to when he mentions that Aspasia had previously prepared a speech that Pericles delivered (236b).

[9] The latest event to which the oration refers is the 'King's Peace' which occurred in 388 B.C. - nine years after Socrates' trial (245e).

But if we choose to set it after the last event occurred, that is, sometime after 388 B.C., then Socrates is portrayed, in effect, as speaking from the grave. There are similar implications for the other figures in the dialogue. Insofar as we are to believe that Aspasia composed the oration, does she do so prior to her son's trial occurring (and if so, how can she compose an oration that mentions Arginusae?). Or does she praise Athens despite her son's trial?[10] As for Menexenus, given his presence at Socrates' death (as it is portrayed in the *Phaedo*) does he hear the oration with some kind of foreknowledge that the trial is to come or with a memory of it having already occurred? In sum, any attempt to attach the figures of the dialogue to their corresponding historical personages yields major, seemingly insoluble interpretive problems.

One way of dealing with the interpretive challenges presented by the presence of these anachronisms is to detach the dialogue from the historical figures who appear within it. That is, interpreting Socrates, Menexenus, Pericles and Aspasia as being essentially fictional characters – who are thereby lifted out of their historical context. But if, for the sake of consistency, we apply this approach to the oration as well, and thus dissociate the oration's version of events from their corresponding historical events, then the oration loses much of its significance as a commentary on Athens' history. Really, the oration becomes a critical commentary on human things only when it is read in light of other historical accounts of the same events.

I can not claim to provide a fully satisfactory explanation for why Plato chose to structure the dialogue as he did. To say, for instance, that he has presented the characters as being 'timeless' does not suffice because this explanation merely leads to the equally difficult question of: why is it so important that the characters in this particular dialogue be regarded as 'timeless'? Is there not a way in which Socrates, as a personification of philosophy, must always be timeless? Furthermore, this explanation falls short because it does not explain the unusual prominence of anachronisms in the *Menexenus*.

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[10] It is believed that Aspasia's son by Pericles (son of Xanthippus), who was also named Pericles, was one of the generals tried in Athens following the battle of Arginusae. See n.16 below.

A second plausible (yet not thoroughly satisfying) explanation is found if we regard the anachronisms as Plato's effort to illustrate 'poetic license' in the creation of a political mythos. This would make the dialogue an allegorical portrayal of how the poets must have created Athens' previous 'historical accounts'.[11] For the reader who notes these anachronisms, the dialogue may be seen as an imitation of the poet's craft. On this interpretation of the anachronisms, the dialogue as a whole would present to the casual reader a mythical picture of Athens in a *truly* golden age: Pericles, her greatest statesman reigns; Socrates lives (and provides the young with a patriotic civic education); and Athens (somehow) wins the war.[12] In support of this explanation, the oration itself obliquely hints that the oration was written by a poet, "But concerning those [deeds] *for which no poet has yet* a worthy reputation for capturing their worth … I think we ought to recall them to memory by praising them…"(239c). But even this explanation is inadequate because it does not explain what we are supposed to make of the specific anachronisms.

---

[11] Like Plato in the *Menexenus*, the various poets often present varying accounts of the chronological appearances of the gods and events that occurred amongst the gods. Thus, they seem to mix these sorts of 'facts' up as it suits their particular purposes.

[12] This most puzzling claim is made in the oration regarding the battle of Arginusae: "It is always right to remember and praise them, for by their virtue we won not only that sea-battle *but the rest of the war*" (243d).

Finally, I am confident that we are supposed to notice the particular time discrepancies, and bear them in mind as we study the dialogue. Taken together the anachronisms add up to an encompassing irony: in a dialogue focusing on history, with all its elements previously determined and fixed in their temporal relationship, the dramatic setting is historically impossible in almost every conceivable way (despite its initial historic plausibility).

When it is pertinent to the following interpretation, I will draw attention to the implications of reading the dialogue as if it is composed with foreknowledge of what is yet to occur or as if it is recited from the grave, with a memory of what has already occurred. Even though this aspect of my thesis is more speculative than I would like, I think there are profitable insights deriving from reading the dialogue either way.

This brings us to a connected issue, that is, the presence of two 'perspectives', or 'frames', from which to read the dialogue. The first, the 'internal perspective' is an interpretation of the dialogue as if the reader is inside the dialogue and limited in the same ways that the interlocutors are. The only information available to the reader is that information which would be accessible to the interlocutors. This would include some limited speculation about the characters based on whatever information is provided by the text itself. This reading supposes that Menexenus is familiar with Pericles' speech, as well as Herodotus' history and Hesiod's work, but does not presume that he is familiar with Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* or Xenophon's *Hellenica*.[13] On this reading of the dialogue, the oration is directed at benefiting Athenians (as well as any foreigners who happen to be in the city).

---

[13] I refer to Xenophon's *Hellenica* which continues the history of the Greeks where Thucydides' history leaves off. Herodotus wrote a history of the Greeks that recounts the era prior to the onset of the so-called 'Peloponnesian war'.

The second way of reading the dialogue is with the recognition that neither Socrates nor Aspasia wrote the oration as we receive it, but rather, Plato composed it for the sake of readers such as ourselves – who enjoy the interpretive benefits of hindsight. On this reading we are called upon to examine Plato's motives for structuring the dialogue as he did with respect to his ambiguity concerning the oration's author. Moreover, this reading presupposes that (like Plato) the reader is aware, from the outset, of Socrates' trial and the outcome of the Peloponnesian war. Furthermore, my own studies have led me to conclude that Plato also expects his readers to have an extensive familiarity with certain outside sources, namely: Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, Xenophon's *Hellenica*, Plato's *Republic*, as well as other Platonic dialogues.[14] I have concluded that Plato supposes we are familiar with Xenophon's *Hellenica* (in part) because of its being a continuation of the investigation begun by Thucydides. It would not have been extraordinary for Plato to anticipate that later readers would look to Thucydides and Xenophon (his successor) for more complete descriptions of the historical events mentioned in the *Menexenus*. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Plato would refer to a work of another certified 'Socratic' such as Xenophon. I believe this approach is supported by the text of the *Menexenus*, which seems to invite us to examine these outside sources, among others. Indeed, the text of the *Menexenus*, if read without antecedent familiarity with the work of Thucydides and Xenophon, appears as a disjointed list of battles with some significant omissions.[15] As a mere history the oration is significantly lacking, and it is only in light of these other historical accounts that a pattern emerges with respect to both the omissions and the unusual presentation of these historical events. The dialogue, and particularly the oration, comes to life only when it is read against the background of these other accounts which lend significance to the battles mentioned therein. Read this way, the *Menexenus* can be seen as a radical departure from what had otherwise been the orthodox understanding of Athens' history. It is thus that the *Menexenus'* oration becomes a prescriptive commentary rather than an exceedingly abridged description of Athens' history.

---

[14] Incidentally, henceforth I will refer to Thucydides' work as his 'history' because the *Peloponnesian War* is not the author's own title, nor is it a precise description of the contents of his work, which would be more aptly entitled: 'Thucydides' War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians' (Cf. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*, Chapter III).

[15] For instance, there is no mention of the Athenian Empire.

The presence of two 'frames' in the dialogue presents an interesting pedagogic challenge to the reader - to which there is no corresponding complication for Menexenus. As Plato's readers, we are required to see both the utility of the oration for the Athenians, and how it benefits us. While on some occasions what is of benefit to the Athenians and to us may be the same, on other occasions the two may differ. Our reading of the *Menexenus* can be expected to transcend mere political considerations, whereas this need not be the case for the oration's Athenian audience. And, however philosophic Menexenus may be, his understanding of the oration cannot draw upon Xenophon's *Hellenica*, nor the Platonic corpus. Nor can Menexenus be aware of the larger picture that Plato presents to us of which Menexenus himself is only a constituent part. On the basis of these considerations, I will henceforth distinguish between the two readings by referring to the one as 'Menexenus' perspective' (which is almost indistinguishable from the Athenian perspective) and the other as 'our perspective', which aims at understanding the dialogue as Plato himself did.[16]

---

[16] I will also refer to 'our perspective' by references to 'Plato's readers', 'us', etc. Menexenus' perspective and the Athenian perspective would be identical in terms of any speculations we might wish to make regarding access to Hesiod and Herodotus and similar issues. They would be distinct however, insofar as

Chapter I

1) The Opening Exchange
6) The Introductory Portion of the Oration
7) The Oration: Early History of the Regime and Pre-Theseus Defensive Battles.
8) The Oration: The Persian Expansion
9) The Oration: Athens' Battles With Other Greeks
10) The Oration: Athens' Internal Strife
11) The Oration: Greek Alliances With the King
12) The Oration: Exhortation to Virtue
13) The Closing Exchange
14) The Overall Pattern of the Oration

Menexenus' relationship with Socrates is more intimate and genial than we can assume to be the case of the average Athenian citizen.

> And Socrates said, "it is nothing secret in my opinion, but if they would find out the pursuits of their ancestors and pursue them no worse than they did, they would become no worse than they were; alternatively, by at least imitating those who now have first place, and engaging in the same pursuits as they, if they use the same things similarly, they would be no worse than they are; and if they use them more attentively, they'll be even better."
>
> "You are saying," he said, [Pericles the younger],[17] "that gentlemanliness [literally, "nobility and goodness"] is somewhere far away from the city. For when will the Athenians, who now have contempt for the old beginning with their fathers, revere their elders in the way the Lacedaimonians do?
>
> Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, III.5

The Opening Exchange (234a-236d)

The *Menexenus* begins with a brief dialogical exchange between Socrates and Menexenus, which will henceforth be referred to as the 'opening exchange'. Socrates and Menexenus seem to have met by chance and it is immediately apparent that the two are familiar with one another. Their genial exchange of information provides a context for Socrates' rendition of 'Aspasia's' funeral oration.

Socrates initiates the 'opening exchange' by asking: "From the agora, or from where, Menexenus?" As it turns out, Menexenus has been both at the agora and at the council-chamber. This information prompts a second question from Socrates: "what in particular drew you to the council-chamber?" It is in response to this second question that we first hear of the Athenians' plan to hold a public funeral ceremony, and the Council's intention to "choose the one who will speak over those who have died" (234b). Menexenus informs Socrates that the Council has not arrived at a decision, but apparently two candidates are presumed to be the favorites: Archinus and Dion.[18] Although Menexenus sounds eager to embark upon a discussion about the details of the day's events, Socrates chooses to turn their attention toward a brief consideration of the general properties of funeral speeches as such. Surprisingly, the discussion that follows never develops into the sort of "inquiry" we are used to seeing Socrates engage in. There are no laborious pursuits of increasingly refined definitions, nor anything else that would seem to qualify as a focused, dialogical investigation. Instead, Socrates volunteers some comments about his own experience of listening to funeral speeches - without requiring Menexenus actively to respond or contribute to his brief analysis. Indeed, Socrates poses only seven questions to Menexenus in the whole of the dialogue, the most intriguing of which are rhetorical in character and remain ostensibly unanswered.

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[17] "Pericles the Younger" is believed to have been the son of Aspasia and Pericles, son of Xanthippus. Pericles and Aspasia are discussed quite extensively by Plutarch, *Life of Pericles*, XXIV-XXV. (All future references to Plutarch are from his *Life of Pericles*) See also Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, translated and annotated by Amy L. Bonnette, n.23, page 164.

Socrates begins his observations about funeral speeches by contending that such speeches are typically "prepared long beforehand", and tend to beautify the fallen men by "giving each man qualities he actually possessed and even some he didn't" (234ca). Socrates tells us these embellishments "bewitch our souls", and cause Socrates himself to feel "greater, more noble, and more beautiful" (235a). These effects stay with him for "more than three days", and these same speeches even seduce those foreigners that happen to be present into seeing both "Socrates and the city" as "instantly more majestic" (235ab). The question naturally arises: ought we, in turn, be accordingly suspicious of the speech Socrates is about to deliver? Could it also give men qualities they did not actually possess? Does it make the city appear exceptionally wondrous? Does Socrates intend to bewitch Menexenus' soul with the speech he is about to deliver? And if so, what are Plato's intentions for his audience? Are they of a similar nature?

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[18] Archinus was connected with the re-establishment of democracy in 403 B.C., and Antiphon, who is mentioned later, was the "intellectual leader of the oligarchic conspiracy in 411 B.C." (Sue Collins, n.4 & n. 9, Thucydides, 8.68). Socrates' assertion that Archinus would provide a worse education than Socrates himself has received implicitly casts aspersion on oligarchy insofar as this is what Archinus was apparently noted for.

The mention of the day's council business, the choice of an orator, directs our attention to the process by which the city chooses both its orators and its leaders. It is significant that the dialogue is set in the midst of this process. We are told Archinus and Dion are likely candidates, and the question naturally arises: how will the assembly choose between the two? And, what is perhaps more significant, how *should* it choose between the two?

According to Athenian tradition, funeral orators were chosen by vote in the council chamber, a democratic assembly which could be regarded as a defining feature of the Athenian regime, distinguishing it from both Sparta and the barbarians - especially the barbarians inasmuch as tyrannical rule expressly lacks the consent and participation of the ruled, whereas democracy and democratic institutions, represented by the 'council chamber', are founded upon such principles. In Athens, a man's claim to speak publicly, and a man's claim to rule - connected as these are - both derive from the established consent of the multitude as it is determined in institutions like the council chamber. In Athens, majority public support is the cornerstone of legitimate rule, and persuasion is the principal means by which leaders are able to influence the opinions and choices of the polity – including its choice of leaders. Thus, speech and speeches emerge as supremely important fixtures of democracy. This arrangement stands in contradistinction to tyrannical rule insofar as it is typically rule based on force and fear rather than on persuasion through speech. It turns out that the difference between democracy and tyranny is pertinent to an interpretation of the *Menexenus*, as this theme subtly pervades the dialogue. Indeed, in the context of a funeral oration for Athens' war dead (men who have died fighting the Barbarians, the Spartans, and each other) I think the question of whether they died for the sake of something worthwhile ought to be of the utmost importance to us. What was the character of the Athenian polity, and was it worth dying for? We modern readers, "foreigners" who follow Socrates around Athens under Plato's guidance, are apt to be natural and passionate allies of Athens. There is a significant sense in which Athens represents our intellectual ancestry. We, as Plato's audience, are inheritors of Athens' glory, and long to share in her victories, much as those who listen to the funeral oration share in the victories of their ancestors. What we may lack, however, and what the *Menexenus* may ultimately provide, is an opportunity to assess the rational grounds for our preference of Athens over the other possible regimes.

The mention of "foreigners", (or "strangers"; xenoi)[19], noted above, leads us to a related puzzle which appears throughout the dialogue. We are told that there are foreigners present in the city, including some foreigners who follow along with Socrates and listen to civic speeches (235ab). It is reasonable to wonder why Plato has included this detail in the dialogue. How are we to interpret the presence of these foreigners who follow Socrates? Later, we shall see, besides foreigners, there are a plethora of references to other distinctions amongst human beings. We hear of Persians and Barbarians, Greeks, and specific kinds of Greeks - most importantly, of those who are barbarians by nature and Greeks only by convention. These various terms may seem, on the surface, to be used simply as a way of identifying groups of people. However their repeated usage in peculiar ways suggests that these terms are present for reasons other than mere utility. This theme of 'distinctions' is also manifest in the realm of linguistic differences. For instance, we hear of "those who speak the same language", implicitly distinguishing them from those who do not (241ea). We will also see that the dialogue requires us to distinguish between whole "peoples" or "races", and other general categories such as "friends" and "enemies". Although it is premature to attempt here to explicate fully the significance of this issue, it is something to be aware of from the outset.

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[19] The word "xenoi" seems to a component of the word "Menexenus", or, more accurately, 'Menexenos').

Returning to the 'opening exchange', Socrates completes his description of the effects of funeral speeches by remarking upon the cleverness of "our" rhetoricians (243c). In the context it is not clear whether he means Athenian rhetoricians or Greek rhetoricians. Either way, we should note at this point that Aspasia, whom Socrates will credit with being his teacher of rhetoric, is not herself an Athenian but a Milesian.[20] This may be significant because, according to Plutarch, the fact that Aspasia was Milesian had some political consequences for Athens. Indeed, he claims her attachment to her homeland provoked her to (successfully) influence Pericles' military decisions.[21] Even if it were not true that Pericles succumbed to Aspasia's wishes in this manner, the mere perception that he did is politically relevant. The suggestion that Aspasia exercised her influence on Athenian politics toward her own ends highlights the practical difficulties associated with having foreigners in the city, especially ones wielding influence. It shows the rationale for xenophobia, and xenophobia repeatedly appears in the oration. This point also bears on the emphasis regarding 'distinctions' noted above. Indeed, it would appear that Pericles' rule may have been compromised by his association with a foreign woman, and this makes the later assertion that Athenians have a "pure hatred of foreign natures" appear all the more intriguing in the context of a dialogue explicitly linked to Pericles' and Aspasia's relationship (245de).[22]

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[20] This passage seems even more significant if we interpret "those who speak the same language" allegorically, as a symbolic representation of "Greekness" (inasmuch as language and thought are connected). The later mention of those who are "Greeks by convention but Barbarians by nature", might be interpreted to be those peoples who merely speak Greek, but do not adhere to "Greekness" in the fuller sense, which, in the context of this dialogue would be defined by the characteristics attributed to Athens and Sparta, both explicitly and implicitly (245de).

In any case, Socrates' comment about the cleverness of their rhetoricians prompts Menexenus to observe that: "in this instance … the one they choose won't do so well, for the whole selection has arisen on the spur of the moment" (235c). Socrates insists that the potential orators already have speeches prepared and one wonders how this is possible if the selection has arisen on the spur of the moment. Socrates also remarks that the rhetoricians' task is not difficult inasmuch as they are competing before the very ones they are praising (235d). Socrates compares this task with the harder task of speaking well of Athenians before Spartans or Spartans before Athenians (235d). The mention of this more difficult task is perplexing for a number of reasons.

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[21] The following is Plutarch's description of Aspasia's (alleged) influence on Pericles:

> … After this, having made a truce between the Athenians and Lacedaemonians for thirty years, he ordered, by public decree, the expedition against the isle of Samos, on the ground, that, when they were bid to leave off their war with the Milesians they had not complied. And as these measures against the Samians are thought to have been taken to please Aspasia … what art or charming faculty she had that enabled her to captivate, as she did, the greatest statesmen, and to give the philosophers occasion to speak so much about her, and that, too, not to her disparagement … Pericles, however, was particularly charged with having proposed to the assembly the war against the Samians, from favor to the Milesians, upon the entreaty of Aspasia" (Plutarch, XXIV).

[22] To the extent that it was rumored that Pericles' policies were influenced by Aspasia's interests, this would be background information that Plato might have expected his readers to consider (Plutarch, XXIV). Pericles' speech is much more welcoming to foreigners than is that of the *Menexenus*; however, Socrates himself consorts with foreigners, Aspasia among others, and thus the oration's apparent xenophobia is especially puzzling.

With respect to the difficulty of praising "Athenians before Spartans", or "Spartans before Athenians", we should consider why this would be the harder task, and the most obvious reason is that the speaker would have to overcome not only the audience's natural preference for their own - for themselves, their own fellow citizens, and their own shared way of life, and all the attachments that go with it - but also their natural animosity to a traditional rival and enemy with whom they have battled for years.

In Athens and Sparta we can see fairly clear representations of democracy and oligarchy respectively. But with respect to Athens' regime, there were grounds to doubt whether all Athenians were unequivocal supporters of democracy. What complicates the simple image of "Athens the democracy" and "Sparta the oligarchy" was the presence of men in Athens who were sympathetic to some sort of more oligarchic rule.[23] Oligarchy was both a real and a consistent threat to Athens' democracy. This threat became actualized twice during Socrates' lifetime. A moderate oligarchy called "The Four Hundred" briefly ruled in the twentieth year of the Peloponnesian war.[24] Then, at the end of the war, a regime known as the rule of 'the thirty'[25], a tyrannical oligarchy, briefly ruled Athens with Sparta's support, beginning in 404 B.C.[26] In view of these background political considerations, the idea of someone speaking well of "Athenians before Spartans or Spartans before Athenians" becomes even more intriguing. Although Socrates is careful not to associate the "speaker" with either city, we can note that it could be especially risky for an Athenian to speak well of Spartans before Athenians, or the reverse. And why would an Athenian wish to praise Sparta? Presumably, such an Athenian could not be wholly convinced of Athenian superiority, and thus would be more likely to recognize Athens' peculiar flaws. Nevertheless, in the eyes of many Athenians, any amicable disposition toward Sparta would be cause for suspicion, and this for good reason.[27] With respect to the longstanding and often violent rivalry between Athens and Sparta, the dialogue does not offer the whole story, but it does provide important reminders of it. Doubtless, Plato expects his readers to possess a more extensive familiarity with the conflict between Athens and Sparta than he himself provides in the *Menexenus* – if not by direct observation, then by local accounts and traditions, probably augmented by having read Thucydides' history.

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[23] See Thucydides, I.107 for an example of how such men aimed to undermine Athenian military strategies, and thus the democracy itself.

[24] Approximately 412-411 B.C.

[25] Some might object to my thesis on the grounds that Plato was somehow compromised by his familial links to 'the thirty' *via* Critias and Charmides.

This view supposes, however, that Plato's thought was determined by his genetic lineage, which I do not accept. Cf. Plato's *Seventh Letter*.

[26] In the *Menexenus*, this event is alluded to at 238c and again at 243e. The rule of 'the thirty', or, the "Thirty Tyrants", was an oligarchy led by Critias, and given military support by Sparta. Xenophon describes this regime in the *Hellenica*, beginning at II.III. 7. This event will be discussed in more depth later.

[27] A good example of this is Alcibiades, who was long suspected of holding oligarchic sympathies; this eventually came to a head in Athens, and prompted Alcibiades to flee to Sparta where he assisted their war effort. (Thucydides, VI.61) Not even Pericles was beyond suspicion in this regard. His vulnerability lay in his friendship with Archidamus, the Lacedaemonian king, and the mere possibility that he might be perceived as compromised by this relationship led him to take the extraordinary step of declaring his own house and lands public property prior to the first Lacedaemonian invasion (Thucydides, II.13).

Later, the oration explicitly claims that the first men who fell fighting the Spartans, "were the first to be laid to rest in this monument". We are also told:

> … these men were the first after the Persian war to become good men and to free those whom they were helping (242bc).

Rather high praise coming from the likes of Socrates. In light of these comments, and for the reasons noted, the relationship between the Athenians and the Spartans seems to occupy a special position in the dialogue. These "first men" died at Tanagra where they fought, according to the oration, on behalf of Boeotian freedom (242b). Repeatedly the oration emphasizes that "freedom" was the motivation for Athens' military efforts.[28] We should note, however, that Thucydides' account of the same event does not attribute Athens' actions to such noble motives – and this is but one of many respects in which Socrates' 'history' does not congrue with that of Thucydides.

Socrates' casual dismissal of the difficulty of the Athenian orator's task inspires Menexenus to ask if Socrates believes he could perform it himself. One could go so far as to interpret Socrates' depreciation of the task as a certain kind of seduction.[29] Not surprisingly, Menexenus immediately challenges Socrates' ability to speak.[30] Socrates assures him that he could, and he claims he can do so because he has a teacher that is "not at all bad at rhetoric", the same teacher that produced the rhetorician "who is preeminent among the Greeks – Pericles, son of Xanthippus" (235ea). Since by the time the dialogue was written, Pericles was long since dead, the one work that can with some confidence be linked to the *Menexenus* is the afore-mentioned history of Thucydides, and specifically, Pericles' speeches therein. The dialogue refers to his funeral oration quite explicitly, Socrates claiming of Aspasia:

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[28] Later it will be evident that this is also a motive underlying the message from the fathers to their sons. See 247eb.

[29] There is precedent for reading it as such; for instance, Socrates displays familiarity with this tactic at *Phaedrus*, 228bc.

[30] Incidentally, Menexenus begins by politely asking: "Why don't you narrate it now then", and soon makes a more forceful demand: "… just speak and you will gratify me greatly … just speak". Again, a couple of lines later Menexenus urges: "But by all means speak". The image of Menexenus urging Socrates to speak is notable because, even though Menexenus has already (playfully) submitted himself to Socrates' rule, he nonetheless bids Socrates to speak. It could be that this confirms the suspicion that Socrates voiced at the beginning of

> … she narrated for me the sort of things that ought to be said; some of these she came up with on the spur of the moment, and others she had previously prepared by gluing together leftovers from the time when, I believe, she was composing the funeral speech Pericles delivered (236b).

Consequently, Pericles' speech makes for a natural point of comparison and from time to time I will refer to it. Although a thorough examination of the two speeches (both supposedly authored by Aspasia) 'side by side' is beyond the scope of this thesis. In sum, my studies have led me to conclude that the oration purposely contrasts with the comparatively excessive and irreverent ways of Periclean Athens (which, as noted earlier, was a 'feverish city'), and prescribes for Athens a regime more akin to the 'healthy city' of the *Republic*.[31]

It is curious that Socrates refers to Pericles simply as a "rhetorician" (235e). Even though he was a gifted rhetorician, this is not what he was *primarily* noted for. It would seem more fitting to refer to him as a great statesman who was also skilled at rhetoric. Calling him a "rhetorician" could be interpreted as implying this skill was actually the basis of his political prominence, if not his defining feature. Notably, Menexenus, upon

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the "opening exchange", that is: "Are you endeavoring at such a young age, wondrous one, to rule us, your elders …?" (234a).

[31] See *Republic* 372a-373e.

hearing Socrates' remark, immediately guesses that "the teacher" in question must be Aspasia. This not only indicates from the outset that Aspasia is familiar to Menexenus[32], but also suggests that she was rumored to have contributed to Pericles' speeches.[33] The casual ease with which this assertion is accepted by Menexenus should strike us as curious. A *woman* was actually responsible for the success of one of the greatest leaders Athens ever had? That Socrates also credits her with being his teacher of rhetoric is all the more mystifying. Socrates' twofold claim that Aspasia wrote both Pericles' speech and his own would seem to stand or fall together. If we do not believe that she wrote Pericles' speech (and it is rather hard to believe), then we are compelled to question his second claim, that she composed Socrates' speech. In any event, thus the stage is set for Socrates' delivery of the funeral speech that was ostensibly taught to him yesterday (cthes) by Aspasia.

Before turning to the oration, we should note the curious feature that Plato has included in the opening exchange, that is, Socrates' claim that he "almost caught a beating whenever he forgot something" that Aspasia taught him. Now, this is a most ridiculous and perplexing notion owing, in part, to the fact that this would be an audacious and impractical use of force. That said, in the upcoming oration, there are other references to the misuse of force, and thus the image of Aspasia's educational techniques may be our first hint that this theme is worthy of our attention.

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[32] This is not too surprising since, according to Plutarch, she enjoyed an immense fame in her time … epitomized by the story that Cyrus, a Persian king, renamed one of his own concubines after Aspasia. (Plutarch, *Lives*, pg. 167)

[33] Although Thucydides does not ratify the assertion that Aspasia wrote the speech that Pericles delivered, it could have been rumored to be the case at the time, however facetious or false this rumor might have been. Menexenus, at any rate, does not bat an eye at the idea. Thucydides may even partake in the jokes surrounding Aspasia's involvement in Pericles' politics if we consider the possible irony of the words he attributes to Pericles toward the end of his oration:

> …On the subject of female excellence to those of you who will now be in widowhood, it will be all comprised in this brief exhortation. Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character, and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among the men whether for good or for bad (II.45).

Indeed Aspasia, *his* courtesan, comes down to us as possibly the *most* talked about female of all antiquity.

The Introductory Portion of the Oration (236d-237b)

The second and central part of the dialogue, the oration, begins with its own introduction wherein we are informed that it is the *law* that "enjoins us to give these men the honor still due" (236de). Thus the speech itself, insofar as it is a speech that is required by law, can be expected somehow to *accord* with the law – presumably Athenian law.[34] The introduction also provides an account of the oration's intended function, which is worth quoting at length:

> … a finely delivered speech can instill in the listeners remembrance and honor for those who have done the deeds … such a speech must adequately praise those who have died and … graciously counsel those who are living, urging children and brothers to imitate the virtue of the ones which lie before them, and consoling fathers, mothers and any other surviving ancestors … (236ea).

It will be necessary to examine if, and how well, the oration fulfills its stated purpose.[35] We are at the outset provided with a list of

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[34] Although the oration does not dispute the justness of this law, Pericles' speech, which was supposedly also written by Aspasia, does dispute the merits of funeral orations (and speech in contrast to deeds) as such – this will be discussed more fully later. It is worthy of note, however, that the differences between this oration and that of Pericles' emerge in the first line, and some are of momentous importance – in this case we are dealing with nothing less than the relative posture of Socrates and Pericles towards the laws under which they live (Orwin, n.13, page. 16).

[35] Incidentally, it would seem that Plato's dialogues perform the same task on behalf of Socrates that the funeral oration does on behalf of these fallen warriors. With Plato's portrayal of Socrates in mind, consider the following prescription:

> … instill remembrance and honor for those who have done the deeds … Where would we rightly begin to praise good men,

"those who are living" which the oration intends to console. This list, however, is distinguished by a conspicuous omission – the oration will counsel children and brothers, it will console fathers and mothers, as well as any surviving ancestors, - but there is no mention of the *wives* of these men. Are they to receive no counsel and no consolation? One could argue that these men are more integral to the lives of their wives than to any other surviving family, yet the wives are not expressly mentioned here. We must presume there is some reason why wives are omitted from this list, especially as they are briefly mentioned later in the "exhortation", where they are encouraged to care for the survivors.[36]

The introduction concludes with an outline of the structure of the main body of the oration honoring the men who have died:

> Let us pay tribute first, then, to the nobility of their birth, and, second, to their nurture and education; after this, let us describe the performance of their deeds, how noble and worthy a display they made of them (237ab).

For the most part, the oration follows this "outline". There is, however, a final section not mentioned here, a sort of "exhortation to virtue" (henceforth referred to as the 'exhortation') in the form of a message from the dead ancestors to their families and the city. Having received a complete description of the "performance of their deeds", the oration, according to its own outline, would end at the point where we hear of "those men who freed the King and drove the Spartans from the sea" (246a). The absence of any mention of the 'exhortation' in the outline may be a hint that it was not anticipated at the beginning of the oration – which would have

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> who in life pleased those around them by their virtue and died in exchange for the safety of the living? … let us describe the performance of their deeds, how noble and worthy a display they made of them …(236eb)

[36] Cf. 248c.

some interesting implications for the real status of this speech. That is, from within the '*Menexenus*' perspective' it would seem that the 'exhortation' is an addition to the oration which Socrates comes up with "on the spur of the moment" (Cf. 236b).

The Oration: Early History of the Regime and Pre – Theseus Defensive Battles (237b-239d)

The body of the oration begins with an assertion of the "autochthonos" origin of the city's ancestors, and the claim that this constitutes the basis for their being "well-bred", (*eugeneias*; 237b). That is, the city's ancestors will have been well-born (or noble), provided the land from which they sprung is itself somehow special. These ancestors and thus their descendents were not born in a foreign land; rather, they have always lived and dwelled in their "true fatherland", and have been nurtured not by a stepmother, but by a mother, "the country in which they live". Clearly there are psychic comforts inherent to the belief that a people are naturally connected to their geographical environment - suggesting as it does that they hold and defend their position with justice, and thus, that they are justified in all their efforts to protect and preserve it.

Although the precise difference between "land" and "country" is unclear, it is evident that the one is to be understood as masculine and the other as feminine, thus presenting their city's origin as the product of an erotic union of masculine and feminine. The feminine part of the equation, the mother country, is said to perform those tasks which in the rest of nature are typically performed by the female, that is, bearing and nurturing. If the image of this erotic union is otherwise consistent with what we see in nature, then one would expect the "true fatherland" to somehow represent the *begetter* of the city. Notice though, it is "most just" to honor the mother first, as this "will be to honor at the same time the nobility of their birth"(237c).

We are given two reasons why their "country is worthy of praise not only from [them] but from all mankind" (237c). To say the Athenians deserve praise from "all mankind" is to say they are not only different from, but superior to, "all mankind" in the following ways. The first and greatest reason, is that their country happens to be "loved by the gods", and witness to this claim is "the strife and quarrel of the gods who disputed over her". Traditionally, the story was told that Athena and Poseidon quarreled over possession of Athens, and that the matter was settled by *vote* in a divine court.[37] This particular myth happens to accord well with the dialogue's general endorsement of democratic process because it portrays the gods quarreling and voting rather than showing gods making war on other gods, or plotting against each other, or having battles amongst themselves.[38]

The claim that their country enjoys divine preference may be a rhetorical tool, aimed at instilling civic pride in the citizens. It would also serve to lend divine justification to Athenian defense efforts by ratifying the worthiness of Athens. Moreover, if gods fought over Athens, one can hardly take issue with humans for doing the same. It is possible to detect a vague hint here that Athens' war dead acted in imitation of their gods insofar as they too - particularly those involved in Athens' internal "strife" - were quarreling to establish who would possess Athens. This could also elevate the status of the war dead in the eyes of the living. This 'proof' of the city's worthiness of praise closes with a question, "She whom gods praised, how could it not be *just* that she be praised by all of humanity?" There is a problem with this argument however, if all humanity does not believe in the same gods.

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[37] Athena, of course, won possession of Athens, but the battle was not violent; rather, it was decided by vote in a divine court, adjudicated by Zeus. Athena won because her gift to the Athenians, an olive tree, was deemed superior to Poseidon's gift, a well of sea water. The story may have further pertinence to the *Menexenus* because Herodotus tells us that the olive tree was burnt along with the temple of 'Erechtheus the Earth-born' by the barbarians under the direction of Xerxes as he became "completely master of Athens". Soon afterward some Athenians, wishing to sacrifice, entered the temple. There they discovered "a fresh shoot, as much as a cubit in length, thrown out from the old trunk" of the burnt olive tree. The image would seem to suggest a renewal of Athena's gift to the Athenians. (Herodotus, VII.55)

[38] See *Republic*, 378bc.

The second reason why their country was worthy of praise is described as follows:

> … in the time when the whole earth was producing and begetting the many animals, wild and tame, their land proved to be pure, barren of the wild and savage; from among the animals, she chose for herself and bore man, who surpasses the rest in understanding and alone recognizes justice and the gods (237de).

What separates the Athenian ancestors from the surrounding "wild and savage" animals is their superior "understanding" and their recognition of "justice and the gods", and this Athenian characteristic derives from a *choice* made by the mother country - perhaps constituting the reason why it is "most just" to honor the mother country first (237c). This section makes the implicit claim that Athens is actually the birth place of humanity, and that the recognition of "justice and the gods" is the defining feature of human beings.

We are also told that women imitate the earth. Perhaps we are to see a prescription here to women; that is, perhaps they have some choice with respect to the kind of offspring they bring forth. It is significant that "understanding" and "a recognition of justice and the gods" were the distinguishing features of their ancestors because it suggests to the descendents that they, by their very nature, possess these same features. This would seem to be prescription disguised as description, and the prescription is specifically for women, that is, they should imitate the earth, not only in terms of giving birth, but by giving birth to humans who possess a recognition of "justice and the gods".

The image of the earth bringing forth humans will be familiar to many readers because it clearly resembles the 'noble' or 'well-born lie' of Plato's *Republic*. And though the similarities are obvious, the subtle differences are even more illuminating. For instance, in the *Republic*, the 'myth of the metals' provides for a hierarchical regime, while the *Menexenus*' oration stresses equality. Later, we will examine these two *mythoi* in more detail.

The oration goes on to give a "great proof" of the claim that their land bore their ancestors, based on metaphorically relating the earth's production of mankind to a woman bearing a child – while contending that the latter is but an emulation of the former, that "woman has imitated earth". Needless to say, this "proof" is of questionable validity and is clearly mythological in character, though we should not rule out the possibility that it depicts a 'truth' by way of allegory. The earth then brought them gods "as their rulers and teachers", who in turn equipped their ancestors to live by educating them in the basic arts and giving them the means to guard their country – specifically, the acquisition and use of weapons (238b).[39] Here, ruling and teaching seem to be loosely equated; and notably, humans and the gods share a common origin. With respect to the gift of weapons, they were granted for the purpose of guarding their country, which may suggest that the Athenians have received divine sanction for defensive war, but it remains unclear whether this may be extended to offensive wars aimed at enlarging Athens' dominions or possessing an empire. In what follows there are no specific weapons mentioned, but there are mentions of rhetoric and political speeches, and perhaps we are to see speech as a weapon. In support of this thesis we should recall that like the Athenians' weapons, speech was traditionally considered to derive from divine inspiration (the Muses), and thus it could be said the gods "gave" the Athenians the power of persuasive speech. Further support for this thesis is found toward the end of the oration where it overtly likens speech (and education) to weaponry by using martial language to describe the children's inheritance.[40] The question of the rightful use of the weapons is an element of the larger theme concerning the proper use of force, in this case relating to how the city ought to employ force against her external enemies.[41]

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[39] It could be that the oration means to refer to Athena and Hephaestus specifically. The following is an excerpt from the Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus:

> Sing, clear-voiced Muse, about Hephaestus, renowned for his intelligence, who, with bright-eyed Athena, taught splendid arts to human beings on earth. Previously they used to live in mountain caves, like animals, but now, because of Hephaestus, renowned for his skill, they have learned his crafts and live year round with ease and comfort in their own houses.

It is puzzling that Plato has the oration begin with events that are so far removed in time. He begins, or has his characters begin (Socrates and/or Aspasia), with "time immemorial" as it were. It is not immediately obvious why this is requisite to the task at hand. But, as questionable as this rendition of early events may be, the oration does give a poetically complete account of the city's origins in an attempt to explain why the men lying before them are good. This theme of 'origins', accounts of where various things came from, pervades the dialogue - beginning in the first line with the explicit question of where Menexenus has come from.[42]

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[40] The connection between weapons and speech is made more explicitly at 249b.

[41] The distinction between her "external" and "internal" enemies is not a clear one, given the oligarchic sympathizers in Athens. This would seem to be a frequent problem in times of war, witness the Japanese and German internment camps of WWII.

Socrates' endorsement of a traditional-mythological account of the city is the more interesting in that he was indicted for *not* believing in the city's gods, which, we should notice, are left unnamed (as are the poets who wrote about them). Nor is it sufficient to look to Aspasia's alleged authorship to settle this matter because she too was indicted for impiety.[43]

In addition to the "natural history" of those who lie before them (their having been descended from remote ancestors born of the earth), we are also invited to consider the political history of their city:

> Having been thus born and educated, the ancestors of the men lying here lived in a regime *they established*, which it is correct to recall briefly. For it is the regime that nurtures human beings, a noble regime, [nurtures] good ones, the opposite, bad ones. Thus it is necessary to show that those who came before us were nurtured in a noble regime, on account of which they were good, as are men now, including these who have died (238bc).

The oration thus turns to a brief description of that noble regime their ancestors established which made the men lying before them good. This regime, we are told, has endured in the same form *almost* continually since it was established. Although the regime is given a variety of names, we are told it is properly called an aristocracy – led by kings, "sometimes by birth, at other times chosen"(238d). For many this passage will conjure images of Pericles, Alcibiades, and the like, but we must also consider this claim against the background of the rule of 'the thirty' and the prominence of demagogues such as Cleon in Athens. Both of which facts call into question the oration's claim that the city has a single criterion for rulers, and it is "wisdom or goodness".[44] Now, it may seem to most readers, especially those who are previously familiar with Socrates, that wisdom and goodness are rightfully equated. We should be cautious however, because it is not at all clear that most Athenians would naturally do so. Rather, they would be more likely to equate goodness with military ability and/or courage.

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[42] Socrates claims that his rhetorical and musical skills came from his teachers, Aspasia and Connus, and that the oration itself came from Aspasia. Also, she had it from when she was writing the speech Pericles delivered. We are told how those who lie before them became good, and how young men upon reaching manhood can come to rule in their father's households. We are also given an explanation of where the hostilities between Athens and the other Greeks came from, namely, "envy".

[43] According to Plutarch, "Aspasia was indicted of impiety, upon the complaint of Hermippus the comedian, who also laid further to her charge that she received into her house freeborn women for the uses of Pericles" (Plutarch, XXXII).

The idea that Athens was ruled by kings, and that "wisdom or goodness" was her single criterion for their legitimacy, is reminiscent of the paradoxical proposition put forward by Socrates to Glaucon in the *Republic*:

> ...Unless...the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place ... there is no rest from ills for the cities...(473cd).

If we bear in mind that philosophy, 'the love of wisdom', is a necessary prerequisite to actually acquiring wisdom (and quite possibly true goodness), then this passage of the *Menexenus* seems essentially related to the regime described in the *Republic*. And if it is impossible, or even highly unlikely, that such a regime could come into being, then the oration's assertion that it previously existed, and presently exists in Athens is surprising to say the least. So too is the characterization of Athens as an aristocracy with the approval of the multitude. In some respects this latter description sounds as much like the Spartan regime as it does the Athenian regime.[45]

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[44] In the grammatical context "wisdom" and "goodness" are loosely equated: "Rather, there is one standard: he who is deemed to be wise or good has authority and rules". It is hard to believe that Socrates sincerely thinks that this has actually been the case with Athens' rulers.

According to the oration, the origin of the regime, or that which makes its existence possible, is the natural equality of all the citizens which derives from their common descent from a single mother, "the country in which they live", or, "the earth" (237c, 239a). This naturally occurring equality is said to be the cause of their regime's being possible, for it precludes men being left out because of "weakness or poverty or the obscurity of their father". Nor are men to be honored for the opposites. Instead, the oration claims there exists a strict meritocracy based on one standard: "he who is deemed to be wise or good has authority and rules" (238e). Again, this description of Athens' regime is highly questionable, and one must presume that it is meant as a prescription for how Athens ought to conduct her internal affairs rather than a description of her actual practices. The oration compares their city with other cities that have been constructed from all sorts of "unequal human beings", the result being that their regimes, "tyrannies and oligarchies", are also unequal. This passage of the oration seems to justify the mythology it presents in terms of the evils it is meant to ward off, that is, tyranny and oligarchy. Instead, the oration describes, and thus prescribes, an aristocratic democracy, one that has always possessed kings – sometimes by birth and at other times chosen. We are to see the oration's regime as democracy at its optimum, whose natural threats are oligarchy and tyranny. Further consideration of the oration will show that the latter, tyranny, may occur in two significantly differing forms: tyranny of the multitude, represented by the events surrounding the battle of Arginusae; and tyranny of 'one or a few', alluded to in the oration by references to Athens' internal discord, or, the rule of 'the thirty' tyrants. Interestingly, the Platonic Socrates publicly expressed, and thus showed in *deed*, his objection to both regimes.[46] Finally, these passages also echo the 'noble lie' that Socrates provides for his 'city in logos' in the *Republic*, for instance, the claim that the city always has kings, and the denial that the citizens' parentage is politically relevant (allusions which will be discussed in greater detail later).

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[45] For instance, Sparta actually had kings, two, who co-ruled. Also, the regime had a semi-democratic assembly comprised of full time hoplites who enjoyed a limited right of veto. It was such a limited democracy that it resembled an aristocracy. Finally, there was a formidable council of elders (gerousia). The Spartan regime did not enjoy the approval of the multitude insofar as it was

Having offered this questionable explanation of how the men of their country came to be good, the oration then turns to the "proofs" of their goodness – namely, the many noble *deeds* they have performed. Put more precisely, these are deeds performed in defense of freedom, causing them to fight both "Greeks on behalf of other Greeks, and Barbarians on behalf of all the Greeks" (239b). There is a brief mention of the defense against Eumolpus and the Amazon invasion, then the defense of the Argives against the Cadmeians, and of the Heracleidae against the Argives (239b). According to modern research, these events (insofar as they have any basis in fact) range in date from the early second millennium B.C. to the thirteenth century B.C., and culminate in Theseus' unification of the cities in Attica. The oration then declines further praising these deeds because, we are told, the poets have already adequately honored their virtue in music; moreover, that to try to do so in plain speech would clearly be less effective. The suggestion seems to be that the oration is intended to continue and complete a task that the *poets* began – which despite its disclaimer,

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designed in part to guarantee continued subjugation of the Helots. It could, however, be said to enjoy the approval of the *Spartan* multitude.

[46] See *Apology*, 32bd.

may imply a connection between the oration's rhetoric and poetic speech. Above we noted two deeds of Socrates' portrayed by Plato in the *Apology*. They too were deeds aimed at warding off tyranny, and thus can be understood as deeds in defense of freedom. In this way, Plato's dialogues can be seen as a continuation of the poet's task of reminding the city of her great battles, and implicitly, her great heroes.

The Oration: The Persian Expansion (239d-242a)

The oration next calls our attention to those deeds that the poets have not adequately treated, and which have thus, according to the oration, remained forgotten. He seems to be ignoring Herodotus. Perhaps, though, in the context of an Athenian funeral oration it would not be fitting to mention Herodotus since he was not himself an Athenian. Moreover, it could be that Plato's larger goals required a 'fresh start' as it were.

First we receive a brief account of the Persian expansion, then we hear of three instances in which the Barbarians were successfully repelled (239d-241d). The story of the Persian expansion begins with the first of the kings, Cyrus, who freed his countrymen (the Persians), and enslaved their former masters, the Medes. It then mentions the expansion continued by his son, and ends in the time of the third king, Darius, toward whom: "no one even deemed himself a rival, and the minds of all human beings were enslaved" (239da). Now, this latter assertion is worth noting. Does "freedom of *the minds* of all human beings" somehow derive from the existence of an opposition to the barbarians? Perhaps deeming one's self a rival to Darius is a necessary prerequisite to comparing his manner of rule to that of the Greeks. The absence of opposition to barbarian rule could amount to the absence of Greeks *qua* Greeks insofar as they can be understood in contradistinction to barbarians. Moreover, if everyone were barbarians, and contentedly so, then presumably all humanity would be devoted to the barbarian way of life. If so, then what happens to philosophy insofar as it is the process by which humans contemplate the question of the best way of life?

It is notable that Darius is said to have compelled his own general, Datis, by threatening to take off his head. The oration makes a point of mentioning this incident, and it could be meant as an illustration of how barbaric rule differed from Greek rule in terms of its internal use of force. The oration refers to three Persian kings as if they succeeded one another by birthright, when really the second (unnamed) king interrupted the orderly succession of Cyrus' line through his own vicious acts. This second king, Cambyses II (son of Cyrus), killed his full brother Smerdis, because he, due to a dream, suspected him of having designs on the throne. Perhaps the omission of the second king's name is intended as a subtle invitation to read Herodotus' extensive description of Cambyses' cruel and capricious reign.[1] Cambyses was notorious for the worst possible transgressions against filial piety: he married his (full) sister, and later killed their brother. He then married another full sister and when she voiced her disapproval of the murder of their brother, he killed her. The Egyptian version of this story contends she was pregnant when she died. Either way, by killing his brother and his wife, he was instrumental in extinguishing Cyrus' line. Cambyses' actions can be seen to contrast with the oration's emphasis on filial piety; since kings are mentioned twice in the oration, once in the Athenian context, and once in the barbarian context, it is reasonable to note the difference between the two. In contrast to the Athenians who had kings ("sometimes by birth, at other times chosen"), the barbarians had kings, sometimes by birth, but at other times by the outrageous use of violence – even by barbarian standards. In addition, whatever else may be said of the Greek regimes, these kind of events, that is, excessive violence within families for the sake of the throne, had not occurred amongst their ruling classes for quite some time, though they do appear in their mythology.[47] Generally, the Greeks are distinguished from the barbarians by their respect for law, especially the laws by which they select their rulers. The rule of 'the thirty' and the events following Arginusae are significant because they are striking examples of Greeks acting in utter disregard of their own laws, and thus both Plato and Xenophon present them as examples of defective rule.[48]

The oration first applauds the men who "met the power of the Barbarians at Marathon", and secondly "those who fought and won the sea-battles around Salamis and at Artemesium" (240da). These men are cited as *educators* of the rest of the Greeks because from them the Greeks "were trained not to fear the Barbarians" (241c). Finally we are told of the third deed which occurred at Platea: "a common venture now of Spartans and Athenians … the threat all these men fought off was *the greatest and most difficult…*" (241c). Greater and more difficult than Marathon? This claim certainly warrants our attention. Nonetheless, the account of Plataea is significant not only for the magnitude of the threat, but also because it is the first explicit mention of the Spartans' contribution to the defense of Greece.

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[47] Hippias, a tyrant who ruled Athens from 527 to 510 B.C. is indirectly associated with the (controversial) story of the assassination of his brother Hipparchus. He was later expelled from Athens by the Spartans, and joined Darius' court, later fighting with the Persians at Marathon. (Thucydides, I.20; VI 54-59) With respect to Greek mythology, there are numerous examples of fratricide and like crimes, the most well known appear in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Although these poets do not precede Plato by much more than a century, their stories are set in the distant past, and thus they are not a (direct) reflection of the political culture that we are concerned with. Moreover, the very fact that the Greek poets, along with their audiences, conveyed stories of fratricide and the like under the rubric of tragedies, points to the Greeks' longstanding disdain for the kind of events that continued to occur through-out this period amongst the Persians. For instance, when Darius II acceded to rule in 424 B.C.; and again in 336 B.C. when Darius III, (a relative of Darius II), acceded to rule *via* the assassination of Artaxerxes. (OCD)

[48] *Apology* 32bd, *Hellenica I*, I.VII.1-35; II.III.11-II.IV.41.

The victory at Plataea notwithstanding, the Barbarian threat was still not completely dispelled. Many "Greek cities were still siding with the Barbarian", and there were reports that the King was planning another attack on the Greeks (241d). The oration exhorts its audience to remember and be grateful to those men who established "full safety" by fighting the sea-battle at Eurymedon, marching at Cyprus, and sailing to Egypt and many other places (241e). This portion of the oration may be interpreted as somewhat deceptive insofar as it speaks of the events surrounding the Athenian expansion as if they were of lesser significance, and characterizes them as defensive rather than offensive. If it is true that the men who fought in these battles "frightened the King into turning his mind towards his own safety", and thus further established safety for the Greeks, this effect might have nonetheless been incidental to the Athenians' real purposes. And although the oration implies that all these acts were an extension of the defense of Greek freedom against the Barbarians that was begun at Marathon, we will see that Thucydides implies these offensive acts were partially inspired by avarice. A comparison of the two accounts leaves us with the distinct impression that the oration is presenting a story of Athens' history that differs from that which was commonly received, especially as regards the nobility of her motivations in the post Median war era.

The Oration: Athens' Battles With the Other Greeks (242ae)

Having discussed Athens' battles against the Barbarians, waged on behalf of Athens and "the rest who speak the same language", the oration turns to hostilities between Athens and other

Greeks, first and foremost the Spartans (241ea). A prefatory remark unequivocally attributes the following engagements to the *envy* Athens incurred as a consequence of her recent successes against the Persians, that "has pushed our city unwillingly into war with the Greeks".

We are told of Athenians fighting Spartans at Tanagra on behalf of Boeotian freedom, and the Athenian victory at Oenophyta (242b).[49] As noted above, the men of these battles were said to be the first after the Persian war to become "good men", and importantly they were the "first to be laid to rest in this monument". It is worth noting that here Socrates gives unequivocal praise to the men that fell in this battle, whereas in the *Alcibiades I* Socrates leads Alcibiades to the conclusion that these men did not have knowledge of the "just and unjust".[50] In the oration we are exhorted to honor these men, but in the conversation with Alcibiades Socrates speaks of the same battle in a manner that may well erode a son's respect for his deceased father by calling into question the wisdom of the men who partook in that particular battle.[51] Presumably the different treatment of the episode at 'Tanagra' offered in the *Alcibiades I* bespeaks the difference between a private conversation tailored to a particular individual and a responsible public speech on an occasion such as this. It also reminds us that it is misleading to read the oration as if it tells the whole story about Socrates' interpretation of Athens' political history.

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[49] Although here it is claimed that the Athenians "engaged the Spartans at Tanagra …our own men winning a victory on the third day in Oenophyta, justly restored those who had been unjustly banished", this account of events, like many others in the oration is questionable. In contrast, Thucydides claims that: "The battle was fought at Tanagra in Boeotia. After heavy loss on both sides *victory declared for the Lacedaemonians and their allies*" (1.108). He further claims the Athenians did not return and battle at Oenophyta until sixty-two days after the original battle. Moreover, Thucydides makes no mention of the Athenians restoring those who were unjustly banished, but he does say that the Athenians took " a hundred of the richest men of the Opuntian Locrians as hostages, and finished their own long walls" (1.108). Now, much more will have to be said about the striking differences between the oration's version of Athens' history and those we find elsewhere, such as in Thucydides' history. Although I have touched on some already, these disparities will be treated systematically in that part of this paper which deals directly with the oration's content.

[50] Incidentally, Alcibiades' natural father died in this battle (*Alcibiades I*, 112c). This would seem to imply that Alcibiades is one of the "sons" to which the oration is addressed; however, Alcibiades died in 404 BC and the oration mentions events that occurred as late as 388 BC. Thus, Alcibiades would be dead at the time this oration would be delivered, but for that matter so would Socrates, and Pericles, and Aspasia …'

The oration next takes up the battle at Sphacteria, where the Athenians captured a number of Spartans on an island:

> Having it then in their [the Athenians] power to destroy them, they nevertheless spared and returned them, and made peace (242cd).

Here again, the oration's version of the story stands in marked contrast to Thucydides' account of the same event.[ii] The oration tells us this act of mercy occurred because the Athenians:

> … believed that whereas they ought to wage war against the Barbarians all the way to destruction, they should fight those of their own race only to the point of victory (242d).

Once more, we see an emphasis on 'distinctions', and more specifically, an apparent emphasis on race. In this case it is implicitly used as a basis for determining military policy in general, and more particularly, to govern the Athenians' use of force. This account makes the Athenians appear moderate toward the Spartans, as if they acted mercifully toward their (Greek) enemies out of some naturally existing affinity between the two warring cities. Thucydides' account, on the other hand, portrays the Athenians as categorically proud and thus immoderate as a consequence of capturing the Spartans at Sphacteria. If we look, for a moment, at the war policy for the 'city in *logos*' in the

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[51] *Alcibiades I*. I.112 bd.

Republic, it includes provisions for moderation toward Greek adversaries, born out of their belief in a natural kinship with them:

> Won't they be lovers of the Greeks? Won't they consider Greece their own and hold the common holy places along with other Greeks? Won't they consider differences with Greeks - their kin - to be faction and not even use the name war? ... Then they'll correct their opponents in a kindly way, not punishing them with a view to slavery or destruction, acting as correctors, not enemies (*Rep.* 470eb).

The oration's description, in contrast to that of Thucydides, shows the Athenians behaving with moderation and generosity toward their Spartan captives, and thus the Athenian warriors appear to be behaving as if they have received an education that was similar in kind to that received by the warriors of the 'city in *logos*'. Since almost surely this was not in fact how events occurred historically, then it is most likely that this differing account aims at presenting the Athenians with a salutary political education, more in harmony with that outlined in the *Republic*. The Athenians, who we are to imagine hearing such an oration, are enjoined to believe that their predecessors acted with moderation toward their Greek rivals. On this basis, among others, their predecessors were worthy of honor. The effect of this is that the oration's audience is subtly encouraged to imitate the characteristics that the oration attributes to the city's ancestors, which are really prescriptions disguised as description, that just happen to accord with the warriors' education in the 'city in *logos*'.

Plato's readers, on the other hand, are given an illustration of how the political philosophy of Socrates (as it is portrayed in the *Republic*) could be implemented (to a limited extent) in any regime, and perhaps particularly in a democracy. In this case it is *via* a civic education that promotes a particular understanding of what constitutes honorable behavior in (and after) battle. Namely, men are to see themselves as honor-bound to exhibit a measure of self-restraint with respect to their treatment of enemies, and especially those they have subdued.

Next we are told of a third war, "in which many good [men] who now lie here died" (242e). These are the battles in Sicily on behalf of the Leontinians' freedom (apparently this elliptically alludes to the disastrous Syracusan adventure), and the battles at the Hellespont (243eb). There is something "terrible and unexpected" about this particular war; that is, it caused the rest of the Greeks to desire victory over Athens to such a degree that they made a treaty with the Persian King in an effort to secure her defeat. The oration then refers briefly to the famous Athenian victory at Arginusae, which occurred in 406 BC.[52]

The Oration: Athens' Internal Strife (243d-245a)

The oration now turns to the internal strife Athens suffered for a period toward the end of the Peloponnesian war, and explicitly attributes Athens' defeat to her own factionalism (243d). This series of events culminated in the rule of the 'Thirty Tyrants',

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[52] Although this was the largest naval engagement of the Peloponnesian war, it is more often remembered for the events which it precipitated in Athens. After the battle the Athenian generals failed to recover the Athenian dead, which led to a trial in which six of the eight generals were sentenced to death. The other two, who refused to return to Athens in anticipation of their fate, fled and survived (Xenophon, *Hellenica* I.VII.1-35). Although these events are not explicitly mentioned in this dialogue, they are related to the dialogue in three ways. The first is that the trial was initiated on the grounds that the dead did not receive proper treatment, and thus their mention and praise in *this* funeral oration could be perceived as significant. The second is that Socrates refused to take part in the trial of the generals and attempted to persuade the council not to stray from previous legal procedure which would have seen the generals tried individually rather than collectively - the effect of which would have been to prevent Athens from behaving like a tyranny insofar as inconsistent application of the laws is characteristic of tyrannical rule. The third is that, (as mentioned above); "Among the six was the younger Pericles, Aspasia's son" (Collins, n.26). It could be that this latter event also foreshadows the ascension of 'the thirty' insofar as it shows the volatile political climate of Athens during this period.

who, along with their supporters, put to death approximately 1500 Athenians. Their reign began in April, 404 BC. The oration flatly denies defeat by any force other than Athens' own discord:
Even now we are still undefeated by others, but we have conquered and defeated ourselves (243de). But, in keeping with its general temper, the oration puts the most favorable interpretation on these events, claiming that "if in fact it should be fated for human beings to endure civil strife, no city would pray to see itself act differently" (243e). It is strange that the oration honors, along with the war dead, men who perished in civil strife. Pericles' oration, by contrast, does no such thing, but neither were there comparable events to which he could refer. The oration reminds us that the reconciliation of the estranged groups within the city was a function of the "true kinship" they enjoyed, "that is steady, and of the same race", again seeming to link the oration to that portion of the *Republic* quoted above (470eb). The oration thus highlights the relevant 'similarities' amongst the citizens, that they are all to see themselves as "brothers of one mother", much as the oration's mythic account claimed. Notice that the oration is silent about the cause of the internal discord, which our historical sources attribute to the continuing tensions between those men who supported democracy and those who supported oligarchy. Instead, the citizens are spoken of as if they are a unified group, who *together* suffered "misfortune" (244ab). By September of 403 BC., democracy was restored - and remarkably - amnesty was granted to all but 'the thirty' and a few others. This lends some support to the oration's construal of Athens' civil strife, but even more surprising is the fact that the reconciliation between the parties was facilitated by Pausanias, a Spartan![53]

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[53] See Xenophon, *Hellenica*, II.IV.29-41. It is also worth noting that Archinus, mentioned in the 'opening exchange' "was an important figure during the re-establishment of democracy in Athens in 403 BC. (Collins, n.4).

Finally, the oration urges us not to forget those who died "in this war at one another's hands" (244a). It is at this point that the 'anachronism problem' arises, as the oration turns to describing events that occurred after Socrates' trial and execution. Given that Socrates died at the hands of his fellow citizens, and that this event fits into the chronology of the oration at this particular point, it is probably not mere coincidence that we are now being encouraged not to forget those who "died at one another's hands", even while praising an attitude of reconciliation.

As a consequence of the preceding events, according to the oration, Athens changed her disposition and made the following resolution regarding her future foreign policy:

> … deciding never again to fight against the enslavement of Greeks either by one another or by Barbarians (245a).

This is a rather extreme policy for Athens to adopt, and there are practical limitations to such policy since sometimes circumstances require that states protect their neighbors in order to protect themselves. Athens will soon abandon this policy (245ab). The oration then identifies Athens' fatal flaw as her being "always too given to pity and a servant of the weak" (244ba). Now, this is a most surprising comment. Whatever else might have been said of Athens during the foregoing period, she was not widely recognized as a "servant of the weak". Rather, according to Thucydides, none other than Pericles himself characterized her as follows:

> Besides, to recede is no longer possible, if indeed any of you in the alarm of the moment has become enamoured of the honesty of such an unambitious part. For what you hold is, to speak somewhat plainly, a *tyranny*, to take it perhaps was wrong, but to let it go is unsafe (II.63).

Surely the common understanding of "tyranny" does not define it as a servant of the weak, and surely few of Socrates' contemporaries would have characterized Athens as the oration does on this point. The question of whether Athens is fairly described as an imperial tyranny, and whether this can be reconciled with characterizing her as a "servant of the weak", shall have to be considered later. For now, however, we should note that the question of the nature of the Athenian regime has reappeared. How does this new characterization of her as a "servant of the weak" fit with the earlier claim that she was and is an aristocracy?

The Oration: Greek Alliances With the King (245a-246a)

The oration turns to a discussion of Greek alliances with the King. Corinthians, Argives, Boeotians, and others agreed to hand over other Greeks on the continent in exchange for money. The oration asserts that the Athenians abstained from doing so as they were:

> …by nature Barbarian-hating because, unmixed with Barbarians, [Athenians] are purely Greek (245ce).[iii]

This section repeatedly emphasizes the highly questionable assertion that Athens enjoyed some kind of racial purity that manifested itself in a relentless resistance against any political collusion with the Barbarians. What may be a promising avenue of consideration regarding this passage, is the possibility that these Greeks ranked their love of money not only over what ought to have been a preference for justice, but also higher than the natural preference for their own, two preferences (i.e., for wealth and one's own) that Plato may wish us to associate with the barbarians rather than the Greeks, regardless of the historical accuracy of this view.[54]

Besides the city's hatred of barbarians, we are told of the city's "pure hatred of foreign natures" (245de). Granted, it is the oration that makes this claim, and Socrates is merely repeating what he was supposedly taught by Aspasia, but Socrates appears to have contradicted this assertion in the "opening exchange". Recall that, while speaking of his own experience of funeral speeches, he claimed, "Often some foreigners follow and listen with me, and in their eyes too I become instantly more majestic" (235ab). If foreigners listen to civic speeches along with Socrates, we may conclude both that Socrates has amicable relations with foreigners and that foreigners are regularly present, and presumably welcome, in the city. Apart from this casting considerable doubt upon the oration's claims regarding the city's pure hatred of foreign natures, more importantly, it would seem we are obliged to wonder how Socrates, the man who listens to speeches along with foreigners, fits into a city that has "a pure hatred of foreign natures"?[55]

As if things were not perplexing enough, we should recall that Athens, with her "pure hatred of foreign natures" supposedly has a foreign woman in her midst, writing speeches for Athens' most renowned rhetorician/leader, Pericles, and consorting with the city's youths (such as Menexenus, cf.249d). And it is this foreign woman, "Aspasia the Milesian", who ostensibly wrote the oration that glorifies Athens' "pure hatred of foreign natures"! Then again, perhaps she speaks from experience.

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[54] There is some precedent for distinguishing between the Greeks and the barbarians on the basis of their stance toward wealth. One of these comes from Herodotus, who tells a story about one of King Xerxes' men inquiring about the Olympic games, specifically, about what sort of prize the athletes competed for. When he was told the victors received an 'olive wreath', Tritantaechmes, the son Artabanus, uttered "a speech which was in truth most noble, but which caused him to be taxed with cowardice by King Xerxes. Hearing the men say that the prize was not money but a wreath of olive, he could not forbear from exclaiming before them all; 'Good heavens! Mardonius, what manner of men are these against whom thou has brought us to fight? – *men who contend with one another, not for money, but for honour!*'" (Herodotus, VIII.26).

[55] The oration's assertion regarding the city's hatred of foreigners is practically the opposite of Pericles' welcoming attitude toward foreigners, as it is presented by Thucydides at II.36,41. Notably, Socrates also refers to himself as a "foreigner" in the *Apology* at 17da.

The "historical" portion of the oration concludes with the mention that the last war was brought to a better conclusion, Athens escaped the war with her ships, her walls, and her colonies. However, there is no mention of the empire she no longer possessed (245e).[56] Thus, this history seems to end with Athens in a defensive position comparable to the one she enjoyed when the Peloponnesian war began. One imagines that ending on such a high and optimistic note would have had some therapeutic effect on an Athenian audience.[57]

The Oration: Exhortation to Virtue (246d-249c)

We will now consider the message that the oration claims the "fathers, as they were about to risk their lives, solemnly enjoined us to announce" (246c). This message consists of a lengthy exhortation from the fallen men to their survivors. It first addresses their children, then their parents, and finally the city. The content of the exhortation will not be discussed in detail here, but it is characterized through-out by an emphasis on self-sufficiency, courage, and various forms of familial piety, some of which are the very sorts of things one is accustomed to hearing from Socrates in other dialogues. In a way, this portion of the *Menexenus* seems the most familiar, or "Socratic" in character. Hence, this portion will be referred to as the "exhortation to virtue": to the children; the parents; and the city.[58]

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[56] This is a "high note" if considered in contrast to the peace the Lacedaemonians offered in 406 B.C., which required the Athenians: "…destroy the long walls and the walls of Piraeus, surrender all their ships except twelve, allow their exiles to return, count the same people friends and enemies as the Lacedaemonians both by land and by sea wherever they should lead the way" (Hellenica, II.II 17-22). The Athenians accepted this peace and thus the Lacedaemonians, under Lysander's command, "with great enthusiasm, began to tear down the walls to the music of flute girls, thinking that that day was the beginning of freedom for Greece" (II.II.22-111). Notably, the Lacedaemonians associate the freedom of Greece with the defeat of the Athenians, and Xenophon does not present any opposition to this assertion. Indeed, preceding his description of the peace, he tells us of the Athenians' fear that they would "suffer the pains which they had themselves inflicted, not in retaliation, but in wantoness and unjustly upon the people of small states, for no other single reason than because they were in alliance with the Lacedaemonians" (II.II.8-13). The peace offered by the Lacedaemonians seems to have been less harsh than the Athenians themselves thought they deserved, and thus this peace is an exhibit of political moderation on the part of Lacedaemonians, given they could have sought vengeance rather than an amicable surrender which merely quelled Athens' military might.

[57] The oration is now speaking of what is known as the "King's peace" which was achieved by means of a pact between the *Spartans* and the *Persians*! This pact allowed Sparta to pressure Athens and her allies into accepting a treaty, 388 B.C.

The Closing Exchange (249de)

The oration concluded, Socrates and Menexenus engage in a dialogical exchange which is even shorter in length than that which opened the dialogue. Here Menexenus expresses some doubt about the ostensible origin of the oration he just heard, even as he assures Socrates that he will not report him to Aspasia for relaying this "political speech".[59] Just as 'origins' seem to play a role in the dialogue, and the historical origins of the city remain vague as a consequence of the workings of time, the concluding discussion between Socrates and Menexenus creates ambiguity about the true origin of this speech.

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[58] As for the wives of the fallen men, in subtle contrast to the "purpose" of the oration discussed above, here they are mentioned in passing, as the message encourages the men's parents to care and nurture the surviving wives and children (248c).

[59] The image of "reporting" speeches to the Muses is prominent in the *Phaedrus* (259bc). This is pertinent to this thesis because I will later argue that Aspasia is a Muse-like figure in this dialogue, and here we see Menexenus promise he will not report Socrates for relaying Aspasia's speech.

The Overall Pattern of the Oration

Having outlined the contents of the dialogue, we may discern a general pattern underlying the progress of the oration. It begins by articulating the history of Athenians *qua* Athenians, contrasting them with so broad a group as "all mankind" (237c). Then the oration moves to the (perhaps legendary) battles the Athens fought very early in her history, for instance, against the Amazons. But increasing attention is given to the battles the closer they are in time to that of Socrates and Menexenus, such as the battle of Marathon where the Athenians vanquished the Barbarians in 490 BC. The oration then goes on to list the battles the Athenians had with other Greeks, especially with the Spartans, and finally addresses Athens' internal turmoil, bringing our attention to Athenians fighting Athenians – events which occurred during the final decades of Socrates' lifetime. We can see that the oration brings "the enemy" of the Athenians increasingly closer in time, geographical relationship, and political affiliation to the interlocutors - from distant quasi-mythical enemies like the Amazons, to the Barbarians, to other Greeks, until finally the real enemy of Athens is said to be Athens herself, *in the present*: "Even now we are still undefeated by others, but we have conquered and defeated ourselves" (243de). Having discovered that the real enemy of Athens is internal discord, we can better understand why the oration concludes with an 'exhortation to virtue' which is directed to the city and the families of the fallen men.

At first, this concluding portion of the oration seems to be distinct from the general pattern of narrowing focus outlined thus far, since now the oration focuses upon various forms of filial obligation rather than battles against enemies. It is possible, however, to interpret the 'exhortation to virtue' as an extension of the 'narrowing' pattern of the oration. The exhortation prompts us to consider the constituent political unit of the city, the family, and we are given prescriptions for the proper relations between the members of families, particularly, how they ought to treat one another in the wake of the series of losses they and the city have suffered. But during the course of speaking to the family members of those who lie before them, the oration subtly continues to narrow its scope leaving the family in order to address the individual. Henceforth, the oration provides a prescription for excellence which can be achieved in the individual human soul:

> The old saying "nothing too much" certainly seems to be nobly said, and it is in fact well said. For if a man depends on himself for everything or nearly everything that brings happiness and does not depend on other human beings, upon whose doing well or badly his own fortunes would be compelled to wander, he is the one who is best prepared to live. This man is the moderate one, and so also the courageous and prudent one (247ea).

This exhortation to self-reliance, moderation, and courage is typically Socratic in character, and one could easily imagine Socrates delivering these prescriptions in his own voice, without the veil of Aspasia's alleged authorship (much as he does in the *Republic*, beginning at 387d). But in line with the general tone of the oration, the achievement of these virtues can be seen as battles, too, akin to fighting the Amazons and the barbarians. So, this quest for the vision of human excellence that Socrates extols in the exhortation may prove to be an extension of the oration's narrowing scope, which brings the enemy increasingly closer in time and place. Thus we are led to a consideration of the battles waged within the individual human soul. In short, the exhortation can be seen as the natural culmination of the theme of great battles, which began between distinct peoples, turned to battles amongst Greeks, then amongst Athenians, then relations within families, and finally a prescription for, and eulogium of, the struggle for moderation within the human soul.

Chapter II

1) The Anachronism
2) The Question of Who Really Composed the Oration
3) The Significance of the Oration's Ambiguous Origin

The Anachronism

Among the many puzzles of the dialogue are the striking anachronisms Plato has introduced into the dialogue by portraying Socrates speaking of events that occurred after his own death. Socrates' trial and execution occurred in 399 B.C., yet he describes events that happened as late as 388 B.C. (245e). Among other things, this structure heightens the poignancy of that portion of the oration that is ostensibly a message from those who have died, and is addressed to those who survive, because there is a way that the anachronism makes Socrates one of the fallen men – one of those who speak from the grave, as it were. Thus we can regard Socrates' own death as exemplifying what is claimed in that message:

> Though we could have lived ignobly, we instead choose nobly to die … For we believe that life is not worth living for the one who brings shame upon his own (246de).[iv]

Since Socrates could make this claim, among others, in reference to himself, we can easily imagine that *he* is speaking to *us*, even though he does so in the guise of the fallen men speaking to their survivors *via* Aspasia's authorship. This makes Socrates' delivery of the oration all the more compelling because there is a congruity between how he encourages others to live - and perhaps more importantly, how to die - and how he himself chose to live and die. His 'Apology' is pertinent here especially with respect to its reminders of his refusal to assist 'the thirty', and his public disapproval of the manner in which the city tried 'the ten generals'. The historical anachronisms make it plain that Socrates lived up to the high standard he here admonishes others to live by, and this can be expected to enhance the oration's impact upon Menexenus and an Athenian audience insofar as they are aware of Socrates' protests against 'the thirty' and his effort to assist the generals. Presuming an Athenian audience would include men who have risked their lives on the city's behalf, they can hardly be expected to listen, with reverence, to the exhortations of anyone they do not believe to be at least as courageous as themselves. From our perspective, the oration is all the more compelling because we, with the benefit of hindsight, can appreciate how the story turns out for both Socrates and Athens. We, especially in light of Plato's *Apology*, can appreciate that Socrates' exhortations are not merely 'talk'; rather, his life and death ratify the sincerity of his noble speeches about justice.

Whether or not we conclude that Plato would have us suppose that Socrates, and not Aspasia, composed the oration, there is another irony in portraying *him* deliver it to Menexenus - especially given the anachronism, since the oration urges the audience to honor those who "died in this war at one another's hands" (244aa). As this reminder occurs precisely where Socrates' trial would fit into the chronology of the oration, it is reasonable to suppose that we are to remember both the conduct of Socrates at his trial and its outcome. Socrates having died at the hands of his fellow Athenian citizens, it is fitting that he be remembered and honored, indeed, perhaps ahead of all the others. So, too, is it fitting that Menexenus is the recipient of this speech, given that he happens to be one of the few men who were present at Socrates' death, as it is illustrated in the *Phaedo*. Thus, he is one of the few Athenians who will witness Socrates die a noble death: "Then, holding the cup to his lips, quite readily and cheerfully he drank off the poison".[60]

If we read the dialogue as if Plato means to remind of us of Socrates' trial when the oration exhorts the audience: "to remember also those who died in this war at one another's hands", and interpret this in connection with what follows that reminder, "since we have become reconciled, to reconcile them as we are able...", then there may be a way in which Plato means us to recall that faction might have arisen out of Socrates' trial. If so, then we can also read what follows as if it refers to the circumstances surrounding Socrates' trial:

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[60] *Phaedo*, 117c.

> For not out of vice did they attack one another, nor out of enmity, but through misfortune. We, the living, ourselves bear witness to this, since we, who are of their race, have forgiven one another, both for what we did and for what we suffered (244ab).

Given the anachronism, there would be some special irony in Socrates stating "We, the living", when in fact there is a way in which we, the readers, are aware that he no longer lived when this oration was to be delivered. Moreover, since some of his fellow citizens chose to indict and execute Socrates, it is easy to imagine that he is referring to this event when he utters the words "what we suffered". There are clear parallels between this passage and the *Apology*, which portrays Socrates' part in his trial. There, Socrates, having been convicted and sentenced to death, assures the audience that his fate is not so bad, and that he forgives those who voted against him: "I at least am not at all angry at those who voted to condemn me and at my accusers" (41d). Although Socrates does criticize his accusers for wishing to harm him, he also states: "Perhaps these things even *had to be so*, and I suppose there is due measure in them", which resembles the oration's assertion that it was through "misfortune" that the Athenians attacked one and other (39b).

The Question of Who Really Composed the Oration

Plato has confronted us with a major interpretive challenge concerning the significance of Aspasia's shadowy presence in the dialogue. Surely there must be some special purpose served by having Socrates attribute the oration to her, recognizing that Plato could have easily omitted this detail and had Socrates deliver the oration as if he himself had composed it, or, as if it were the invention of some unnamed rhetorician. The fact that Aspasia is a woman, but not officially a wife, only heightens this mystery.

Now the dialogue provides substantial grounds for our doubting Socrates' claim that Aspasia really composed the speech that he recites, having learnt it from her. At first, it seems clear enough, for he explicitly states that Aspasia taught him the oration he delivers:

> But just yesterday I heard Aspasia going through the funeral speech for these same dead … so she narrated for me the sort of things that ought to be said … After all, I learned it from her, and I almost caught a beating whenever I forgot something (236bd).

On this basis alone, it would seem to be a straight forward matter: we are intended to believe that the oration that follows is Aspasia's product, delivered to Menexenus (and ourselves) by Plato's Socrates. But he is a notorious ironist. Moreover, there are subtle indications that we are to 'see through' what may be only the philosopher's pretense that this oration actually came from Aspasia, and they first appear in the opening exchange while Menexenus attempts to persuade Socrates to speak:

> …Socrates, just speak and you will gratify me greatly. Whether you wish to give Aspasia's speech *or whomever's* just speak (236c).

After Socrates has delivered the oration, Menexenus' doubts become more explicit. Socrates concludes: "There you have it, Menexenus, the speech of Aspasia the Milesian", to which Menexenus replies:

> By Zeus, Socrates, this Aspasia you speak of must be blessed *if*, though a woman, she is able to compose such a speech … I'm very grateful to her or to *whoever else told you this speech* (249de).

If we share, as I think we must, Menexenus' doubts as to whether the speech Socrates supplies is actually Aspasia's, then it seems reasonable to read it as if it is actually Socrates' invention, with the result that one can read the oration in at least two distinct ways. First, taking Socrates at his word, and reading it as if the oration came from Aspasia; and second, as if Socrates invented it himself and merely *claimed* to have learnt it from Aspasia.[61] Each reading produces a distinct interpretation of the oration inasmuch as the orator's identity can be expected to affect the interpretation. The fact that the two authors are not of the same sex will also have a notable effect on how we view the oration. For instance, if we attribute the oration to Aspasia, since she is female, we must bear in mind that she may only deliver a speech in relative privacy and to a select audience – which, incidentally, calls into question the oration's assertion that there exists a strict meritocracy in the city's regime.[62] On the other hand, if we read it as if it is Socrates' invention, we must then try to figure out why he (falsely) attributes it to Aspasia. It is my view that the latter interpretation is the more compelling, that is, the oration is indeed Socratic; nevertheless,

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[61] An additional reason for doubting Aspasia's authorship emerges in connection with the oration's links to the 'city in *logos*' that we see in *Republic*; there is no explanation for how she might have acquired an intimate familiarity with the 'city in *logos*' as she was not present for the conversation of the *Republic*.

[62] Of course, it only applies to its own citizens, but any Aspasia-like Athenian woman would be similarly excluded from direct political participation.

Plato has invited us to consider the implications of its being composed by Aspasia, and this too is fruitful.

The Significance of the Oration's Ambiguous Origin

If it is well-nigh impossible to determine with certainty which of the two suggested interpretations is definitive, we may reasonably conclude that the ambiguity itself was intentional; Plato could have clarified this issue if he so chose. Therefore, besides bearing in mind that there exist two distinct interpretations of the oration, we must also attend to the significance of the ambiguity itself, as this might actually point to a third interpretation of the oration.

As a start, Plato's contrived ambiguity concerning authorship of the oration may be meant as an image of the difficulties inherent in writing historical accounts as such. If the reader personally experiences the difficulty of determining "who said what" in the context of this dialogue, he may be more disposed to appreciate the manifold difficulties inherent to the tasks performed by a Herodotus or a Thucydides. The origin of the Athenians as well as the origin of their mythologies are obscured by time. Plato's equivocal posture toward the authorship of this oration forces the reader to confront the limitations faced by anyone who wishes to gain knowledge of the human past.[63]

The ambiguity of the oration's origin, which attributes its inception to either or both a man and a woman, suggests the image of its being produced by a male and a female who have consorted with one another. This image has obvious erotic overtones which may hint toward a deeper metaphorical significance, particularly in connection with a poetical, educational product. The difficulty of determining which parts and/or characteristics of the oration are attributable to which possible author mirror the difficulty of determining which human qualities are properly understood as either male or female. The oration clearly addresses the education of citizens, and by extension, the civilizing of humans. We are told that it is the recognition of justice and the gods that elevates a people above the "wild and savage" (237de). It is reasonable to suspect, however, that men and women make different contributions to the education of the young, and perhaps it is possible to detect some of these differences in the context of this dialogue. For instance, Socrates repeats 'Aspasia's' oration to Menexenus; thus *he* apparently deems it worthy of Menexenus' attention. However, there must be some point to his attributing it to Aspasia because Menexenus is only receptive to the oration *because* it comes from Socrates, and he displays little, if any, interest in Aspasia's part in its production. But is this not often the case with young men? Do they not seem more readily disposed to take seriously the words of a man than those of a woman? Which is not to say that women do not make meaningful contributions to the education of young men, but perhaps it does imply that men must support and ratify those contributions just as Socrates reiterates the worth of Aspasia's speech to Menexenus in the closing exchange.

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[63] As does Plato's 'global irony': the presentation of a dramatic setting that is riddled with anachronisms that surrounds an oration that is intimately connected to 'history'.

As for Plato's motivations, one plausible explanation for his structuring the dialogue in the manner he did may emerge in connection with: "speaking well of Athenians before Spartans, or of Spartans before Athenians"; … "when someone competes before the very ones he is praising, it is no great thing to be thought to speak well" (235d). Ideally, praise of one's own should really be confined to that of our own which is good, not merely that which we love. We are, however, naturally inclined to love our own city - often with indifference to its goodness or lack thereof. On the matter of praise, Leo Strauss observes:

> [O]nly to confirm the first impression of the relation between Plato and Thucydides: the Peloponnesian war was waged by an Athens which was informed by a regime regarded as defective by both Thucydides and Plato and which was known to them through their seeing it … Plato did not permit his Critias to describe Athens' superlative glory: he did not wish to allow an Athenian to praise Athens. Thucydides, the historian was indeed compelled to permit his Pericles to praise Athens. But he did his best to prevent Pericles' Funeral Speech from being mistaken for his own praise of Athens.[64]

If this is so, then it may go some way toward explaining why Plato has Socrates attribute authorship of the oration to Aspasia and his emphasis of her foreign birth: "There you have it, Menexenus, the speech of Aspasia the Milesian" (249cd). However, while this may explain why he attributes the oration to a non-Athenian author, it does not explain why he attributes it to a woman, much less why this particular woman.

We may also question whether the historical Athens of which the funeral oration ostensibly speaks was truly worthy of praise - especially by Socrates, for whom the virtue of moderation was of central importance. The case has been made that the Athens of the Peloponnesian war[65] lacked this specific virtue:

> It consisted in the complete triumph of the spirit of daring and its kin over that of moderation and its kin. Men came to praise the most reckless daring,

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[64] *The City and Man*, Page 141. By contrast, Steven B. Salkever, in Socrates' Aspasian Oration, equates Thucydides' and Pericles' view of Athens: "For Thucydides and Pericles , the key standard are those of greatness and splendor". *American Political Science Review*, March 1993, Vol.87, No.1.

[65] This dialogue requires the reader to distinguish between various incarnations of Athens. The Athens of the Peloponnesian war differed in character from the Athens that preceded and succeeded it. Also, we must be careful to mark the difference between the historical Athens, and the beautified Athens presented in the dialogue.

> quickness, anger, revenge, distrust, secrecy, and fraud, and to blame moderation, caution, trust, good-naturedness, open and frank dealings; what was called manliness took the place of moderation.[66]

If Plato held a similar view of Athens, then the oration could be intended as a blueprint for correcting the flaws Athens was prone to. The "triumph of daring over moderation", as well as the deep distrust that seems to have been rampant among the citizens, are each addressed within the oration. Clearly, the 'exhortation' makes a case for moderation[67], and the glorification of filial obligation therein could be expected to contribute to a renewal of trust amongst citizens, especially in the aftermath of civil discord. In the context of recounting the events of the first revolution during the Peloponnesian war, which occurred at Corcyra, Thucydides describes the horrors of civil strife, with emphasis upon the especially hideous – not to say unnatural – phenomena of violence within families for the sake of politics:

> Death thus raged in every shape; and as usually happens at such times, there was no length to which violence did not go; sons were killed by their fathers and suppliants dragged from the altar or slain upon it … So bloody was the march of the revolution, and the impression which it made was the greater as it was one of the first to occur. Later on, one may say, the whole Hellenic world was convulsed … (III.82).

Like in kind to the civil strife Athens endured during the rule of 'the thirty', where the underlying discord derived from the continued tension, as well as distrust, between oligarch sympathizers and democrats, the Corcyraean revolution was spawned by the desire of "the popular chiefs to bring in the Athenians, and by the oligarchs to introduce the

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[66] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*, Page 147. Cf. *Republic*, 560da.

Lacedaemonians".[68] With respect to the oration's solution to the problem, the continued internal coherence of a city might proceed from the sort of filial honor and mutual obligation that is encouraged in the 'exhortation'. Civic trust might begin in the proper relations of members within families and extend beyond the family to connect the citizens to one another through ties of civic *kin*ship. The latter is clearly nurtured throughout the oration, but is especially prominent in the oration's founding myth which exhorts the citizens to regard each other as "brothers of one mother". And finally, the oration implicitly proscribes against political extremism by highlighting the virtue of moderation in the message from the war dead to their sons. What better way to reform the regime than to reform the souls of its citizens?

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[67] See 247ea.

[68] Thucydides, III.82.

Chapter III

1)Socrates As Author

2)The Effects of Funeral Speeches Upon Socrates

3)An Introduction to the Politics of the *Menexenus*

4)Speech and Deed

5)Why Audiences Are Receptive to Funeral Speeches

6)Funeral Speeches and The Transmission of Virtue

7)The *Menexenus*' Aristocratic Democracy, and its Defense Against Tyranny and Oligarchy

Socrates As Author

On the basis of the arguments made above, it seems that Menexenus suspects that Socrates composed the oration himself. In the first place, from Menexenus' perspective, nothing Socrates says prohibits him from adding to the speech he (supposedly) received from Aspasia. When Socrates is asked by Menexenus what he would say if he "should have to speak", Socrates replies: "Of my own, *perhaps* nothing" (236ab). Notice he does not categorically rule-out saying something of his own, and this leaves open the possibility that (perhaps) he may, if he wishes, do as his supposed teacher did and come up with a few things on the "spur of the moment". Furthermore, what if he does not *have* to speak, but *chooses* to speak? Then might he say something of his own? Clearly Socrates delivers this oration to Menexenus of his own free will, and even offers to continue to do the same in the future.

Viewing Socrates' claim that he has nothing of his own to say from 'our perspective', Socrates can be interpreted as emulating the guardians of the 'city in *logos*' who were mandated to possess everything in common, and to hold nothing privately - not even children. Indeed, Plato has constructed the dialogue in such a way that it is very difficult to assign an 'owner' to the oration. It might be Aspasia's, it might be Socrates', and henceforth it might become Menexenus'. And whatever else it may do, it aims at explaining the *common* origins of the city's inhabitants, and this understanding of the city's history, to be at all effective, would be held in common, as a component of the city's collective psyche.

Socrates' refusal to state with any certainty that the oration is his own, contrasts with his description of Aspasia's attachment to it. To begin, she supposedly cares for it with such ferocity that she is willing to employ violence to protect it - she threatened Socrates with a beating whenever he forgot something. Which is to say, she severely reprimanded him when he did not take proper *care* of her speech. Socrates also describes Aspasia as being somewhat possessive of her speech, he claims: "I fear that my teacher will be angry with me if I divulge her speech" (236c). Together, it would seem that she is supposed to have displayed a fierce, maternal-sort of attachment to the speech, as if it were her own child.

The Effects of Funeral Speeches Upon Socrates

During the opening exchange, Socrates describes his own experience of the effects of funeral speeches at some length:

> …And they even praise us, the living, such that I for my part, Menexenus, *feel altogether ennobled by their praises. Each time, as I listen and am charmed, I am altered, believing that I become at that moment greater, more noble, and more beautiful*. Often some foreigners follow along and listen with me, and in their eyes too I become instantly more majestic. And indeed, it seems to me that they, having been *seduced* by the speaker, feel the same things towards the rest of the city as they feel towards me, believing her to be more wondrous than before. The sense of majesty stays with me for more than three days. The speech is so fresh and the speaker's voice so rings in my ears that scarcely on the fourth or fifth day do I remember who I am and notice that I am of this earth – in the meantime I almost believe that I am living on the Isles of the Blessed. Such is the cleverness of our rhetoricians (235ac).

The italicized portion resembles the sensations a woman's praise might inspire in a man; therefore, it is seems fitting to associate the experience with seduction (an image which is further supported by the common understanding of the practices of courtesans). Soon after Socrates describes the effects of funeral orations upon himself, he tells Menexenus that: "yesterday I heard Aspasia going through a funeral speech for these same dead" (236b).[69] If Menexenus (or we) take seriously Socrates' claim that Aspasia recited the speech to him yesterday, must he not be presently feeling the effects of the funeral speech? Is it possible he is presently experiencing the "sense of majesty" that he claims stays with him for more than three days? This would suffice to explain his willingness to so glorify Athens. Socrates positively emphasizes the duration of the effects claiming:

> …the voice is so fresh and the speaker's voice so rings in my ears that scarcely *on the fourth or fifth day* do I remember who I am … (235bc).

That Socrates may be presently experiencing these effects, yet is also conscious of them, has a two-fold significance. The first is that Socrates' consciousness of the effects may diminish their force by enabling him to defend against them. And, by offering a description of these effects upon himself, Socrates alerts Menexenus to be wary of them, thus providing what amounts to an innoculation against his being seduced by them. At the very least, Plato's inclusion of Socrates' description of the effects may serve to warn us, the readers, to guard against being charmed or seduced by the oration that follows. As we will see later, there is an explicit danger of this happening insofar as a casual reader might take for granted that all the oration's claims about the city and its citizens are true, or even that Socrates or Plato believed them to be the whole truth.

In the quote above, Socrates likens the immediate effects of hearing a funeral speech to being in a state wherein he almost believes that he is living on the "Isles of the Blessed".[70] In the words of one scholar, the "Isles of the Blessed" were believed to be "a happy place where good men live forever. In some accounts they went there before dying, in others afterward".[71] It is likely there is a connection between Socrates' mention of this place and Plato's anachronistic presentation of him speaking of events which took place years after his own death. In so doing, Plato has portrayed Socrates as if he were immune to the physical effects of death by showing him retaining the ability to speak to the young after he has in fact died. And in a sense, Plato through his dialogues has provided a means by which Socrates can, even now, speak to anyone who wishes to listen and, because of the relative permanence of written speech, the dialogues could be said to represent a "happy place where good men live forever".

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[69] There is a problem here with the Collins' translation, however, it is clear that the Greek text reads "yesterday", as it is translated by R.G. Bury, for "The Loeb Classical Library", Harvard University Press, 1989.

After Socrates describes the effects of funeral speeches upon himself, he attributes these effects to the "cleverness of (their) rhetoricians" (235c). Menexenus interprets this as just another instance of Socrates "making fun of the rhetoricians" (235c).[72] Perhaps this is so given that Socrates does not deny that he has made fun of the rhetoricians in the past, nor does he claim to be serious now. In light of this, consider what Socrates says shortly thereafter:

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[70] The "Isles of the Blessed" are also significant because they happen to appear twice in the *Republic*, and both times they are mentioned in connection with those who have spent their time with philosophy, returning to drudge in politics and rule for the city's sake. This is pertinent to the *Menexenus* if one accepts that, having heard Aspasia's speech yesterday, Socrates presently (almost) believes he is currently living on the Isles of the Blessed, and that Socrates' delivery of the "oration" to Menexenus constitutes a political act, thus licensing us to see the *Menexenus* as an illustration of the philosopher participating, (albeit privately) in the political affairs of the city. And surely the transmission of "political speeches" to young men of Athens' governing class is a political act. By having Socrates use a phrase like the "Isles of the Blessed", Plato blurs the boundaries between the old and the new, as if he wishes to have his Socrates use old ideas as a foundation for new ones. The employment of a sentiment the audience is both familiar with, and trusting of, is an excellent way of introducing new doctrine – typically, the audience naturally trusts those who expound the old, and they rarely notice the new that may be enshrouded within it.

[71] Bloom, *The Republic*, notes to Book VII, n.4.

[72] Incidentally, the phrasing of this comment implies that Menexenus has had a number of opportunities to hear Socrates do so, the suggestion being that the two have conversed often since the *Lysis*.

> I happen to have a teacher who is not at all bad in rhetoric, but has produced, in addition to many other great *rhetoricians*, the one who is preeminent among the Greeks – Pericles, son of Xanthippus (235e).

If Pericles is a rhetorician, and Socrates does not deny that he is "always making fun of the rhetoricians", is it not possible that he is presently making fun of Pericles? Indeed, to say that Pericles did not write his own speeches but had Aspasia do so for him certainly holds Pericles up to some ridicule. From the perspective that Pericles presently lives, we may see Socrates' motivation for ridiculing Pericles.[73] Insofar as Socrates positions himself as Pericles' competitor by volunteering to perform a task that was previously and famously performed by Pericles, there is some rhetorical effect in ridiculing Pericles, and thus undermining his claim to Menexenus' esteem. Although Socrates also claims to have learnt his speech from Aspasia, he is shielded from any similar ridicule given that Menexenus doubts the claim.

There is a further significance to Socrates' mention of Pericles prior to the oration, owing to the fact that he refers to him as "Pericles, *son of Xanthippus*" (235e). Later, the oration will make the following claim about the Athenian regime:

> …unlike what happens in other cities, no one is ever left out because of weakness or poverty or the obscurity of his father, nor is anyone ever honored for the opposites (238de).

Clearly this was not the case in historical Athens, and Socrates' clever mention of "Xanthippus" is a reminder that Pericles' himself enjoyed the benefits of a very noble birth. According to Plutarch:

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[73] Since Pericles is referred to as a rhetorician and not a statesman, to take this away is to leave him with nothing.

> Xanthippus, his father, defeated the Persian generals at Mycale. His mother, Agariste, was the granddaughter of Clisthenes, who fearlessly drove out the sons of Pisistratus, put an end to the tyranny, enacted laws and established a new constitution excellently designed to bring about harmony and security.[74]

And far from being unaware of the sorts of benefits Pericles might bestow upon a son, in the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates draws them to Alcibiades' attention. Socrates is speaking in private to Alcibiades:

> … Greater than all the things I have spoken of, however, is, as you suppose, *the power that is available to you in Pericles, son of Xanthippus*, whom your father left as guardian to you and your brother – a man who is able to act as he wishes not only in this city but in all of Greece and among many and great barbarian peoples.[75]

Thus, there are real grounds to question whether Socrates believes, along the with the oration, that the fame of a father is irrelevant in Athens. Even more to the point is the fact that Pericles' illegitimate son by Aspasia, "Pericles the younger", who became an Athenian general, actually became an Athenian citizen as a result of his father convincing the Athenians to overturn a strict citizenship law that Pericles himself had earlier initiated – (when his legitimate sons still lived).[76] In sum, it is with some irony that Socrates mentions "Pericles son of Xanthippus" just prior to delivering an oration that posits the Athenian regime to be a strict meritocracy, and explicitly denies that the stature of one's father has any political import whatsoever.[77] Although Pericles was an excellent ruler, it would be best for Athens and for politics generally - if rule was always distributed on the basis of merit insofar as she was not always fortunate enough to have a 'Pericles' born to one of her best families, and thus easily accede to rule.

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[74] Plutarch, III.

[75] *Alcibiades I*, 104b.

[76] Plutarch, XXXVII.

Socrates and Menexenus: An Introduction to the Politics of the *Menexenus*

The opening exchange begins with Socrates asking Menexenus where he has been: "From the agora or from where, Menexenus?" (234a). Socrates is right: Menexenus has been at the agora. But he has also been at the council-chamber, and it is the events that occurred there that are foremost in his mind:

> I went to the council-chamber since I had learned that the Council was about to choose the one who will speak over those who have died. For you know they intend to hold a funeral? (234b)

Menexenus' attendance at the council-chamber suggests an attraction to politics, a suspicion which is confirmed by the enthusiasm he displays in relating the day's events, and his apparent willingness to discuss the two contenders, Archinus and Dion. By contrast, although Socrates was evidently aware of the Athenians' plan to choose an orator, he chose not to attend and observe the events taking place at the council chamber. Upon learning from Menexenus that the choice was delayed until tomorrow, and that either Archinus or Dion would likely be chosen, Socrates abruptly steers the conversation away from the day's politics and these specific orators. He does not ask why the selection was delayed - a natural question under the circumstances - nor which of the two was either the better or the more likely candidate. Although it is left unstated, the question of who the better speaker would be is left hanging in the air, and may serve to provoke the reader to contemplate the choice itself, which, in effect, is to reflect upon what are the appropriate criterion for making such a decision.

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[77] He might have merely said "Pericles".

Earlier in the "opening exchange" we witnessed some provocative bantering between Socrates and Menexenus:

> Socrates. What in particular drew you to the council-chamber? Or is it clear that you believe you have come to the end of education and philosophy, and, supposing yourself sufficiently prepared, are you intending to turn to greater things? Are you endeavoring at such a young age, wondrous one, to rule us, your elders, so that your house will never cease to provide us with a caretaker?
> Menexenus. If you, Socrates, permit and advise me to rule, I will be eager; but if not, I won't …
> (234ab)

Notice that Socrates' choice of words - "so that your house will never cease to provide us with a caretaker" - implies that Menexenus' father (or someone close) is or was a "caretaker" of Athens. So right from the outset we're given grounds for doubting whether the oration's assertion that one's father's stature is of no political consequence in Athens. Of course, insofar as a father can pass 'merit' or 'political virtue' on to his son, it is not necessarily harmful to the city if the sons of great men be especially well-esteemed. The problem is that there is no way of guaranteeing that great men will successfully transmit their 'political virtue' to their sons, and the only way of assessing whether they have or not, is by assessing the merit of the sons. Which in effect directs us back to the regime the oration favors, that is, a meritocracy wherein men are assessed solely on the basis of their wisdom or goodness.[78] Here, Socrates implies that Menexenus may actually desire rule because this would continue a practice that has already been established in his own household, which is to say, Menexenus would thus be emulating his father, if not forefathers. It is telling that Socrates' uses the term "caretaker" as it would seem to imply a particular kind of rule that is likely to be characterized by good will toward the ruled. So also, it would seem to presuppose that the "caretaker", possesses some knowledge (or at least correct opinions) about what is beneficial to the ruled.[79]

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[78] The presence of families involved in politics does indirectly benefit the polity as it may encourage public support for 'family' as such by providing the public with examples of family solidarity and so forth (e.g., the Kennedys).

Notably, Menexenus does not deny any of Socrates' suggestions. Responding to Socrates' playful challenge with playful submission, he invites Socrates to bless his endeavor to rule. Actually, Menexenus provides a clever answer to Socrates' series of questions. One could even describe it as prudent, and similar to the kind of answer one receives from a seasoned politician: non committal, slightly playful, pleasing, and flattering. Although Socrates does not provide the "permission" Menexenus solicits, it is equally important to note that Socrates does not explicitly reject the idea of Menexenus ruling in the future. Socrates' willingness to transmit this "political speech" to Menexenus, along with his closing offer to continue to do so in the future, could be interpreted as a tacit endorsement of Menexenus' political aspirations (249e).

The suggestion that education and philosophy might constitute a preparation for political rule seems to be implicit in the opening series of questions quoted above (234ab). Later, the oration revisit this theme when it describes its regime:

> … the same regime existed then as now – an aristocracy, in which at present we are living as

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[79] Socrates seems to use "care" in a similar manner when speaking to Meletus in the *Apology*. There he states, "Come now, tell these men, who makes them better? For it is clear that you know, since you care, at least … does it not seem to be shameful to you, and a sufficient proof of just what I say, that you have never cared?" (24de)

> citizens, as we have almost continually since then … though the multitude has control over most of the city's affairs, they give the ruling offices and authority to those who are consistently deemed to be best; … there is one standard: *he who is deemed to be wise or good has authority and rules* (238ce).

By considering these passages together, we can provisionally conclude that Socrates and/or the oration implies that wisdom ought to be either a prerequisite or a standard for rule. Seen this way, a "love of wisdom" becomes a criterion for would-be rulers such that they might practice philosophy, or at the very least, be sympathetic to philosophy or philosophers.

In the 'opening exchange', Socrates reminds us that there is a continuing succession of potential "caretakers" like Menexenus, young men who are interested in politics and eager to rule their elders along with everyone else. This theme is also reiterated toward the end of the 'exhortation to virtue', where it is made clear that they ought to do so in a timely fashion, after they have reached manhood, and have been properly armed with a fitting nurture by their city. This nurture can be expected to issue in a relatively gentle manner of rule, as is implied by the term "caretaker". Just prior to the exhortation it is said of the city's young men:

> When they reach manhood, she exhibits and recalls the pursuits of their fathers by providing the instruments of their patrimonial virtue and sends them forth to their inheritance arrayed in full armour; she sends them, under the grace of an omen, to begin ruling in the house of their fathers (249b).

Here, the young men in question are seriously expected to accede to rule in the house of their fathers. While the "inheritance" in question is their country, the "armour" they are to receive seems to be their nurture and education, and it is noteworthy that armour is a protective device, (as opposed to a bow and arrow or something of that sort). This passage seems to contrast with the beginning of the dialogue, where we saw Socrates allude to Menexenus' desire to rule his elders "at such a young age", so that his "house will never cease to provide (us) with a caretaker" (234ab). Although it is possible that Menexenus is the kind of young man who would wish to rule prematurely - that is, prior to his arrival at educated manhood - he does submit himself to Socrates' rule and promise: "If you, Socrates, permit and advise me to rule, I will be eager; but if not, I won't".[80] We could interpret his submission as an indication that he has the requisite self-control, as well as the desire, to refine and educate any impulse to rule he may harbor. Although we may look favorably on his willingness to obey the philosopher, his fellow citizens might not approve so readily. On the reading of the dialogue that sets its date of composition shortly after 388 B.C., Socrates' trial had occurred only a little more than ten years earlier, and would thus be fairly fresh in audience's memory. Perhaps this provides a plausible, if partial, explanation for why the two are depicted conversing in private. To the extent the oration represents a novel education, Socrates is here portrayed as continuing to do that which he was convicted of, namely, corrupting the youth. Moreover, to the extent that the oration avoids any specific references to the gods, it could also be seen as being somewhat impious, which corresponds to the other charge

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[80] Socrates' hint that Menexenus would wish to rule his elders "at such a young age" puts Menexenus in rather elite company. There are other illustrious young men of Athens who, we are told, have this same impulse: "When Glaukon, the son of Ariston, attempted to make a public address out of a desire to preside over the city although he was not yet twenty years old". (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 6.1) And again, Socrates says the following to Alcibiades upon his *first* meeting with him: "You believe that if you come shortly before the people of Athens – and you believe this will occur within a very few days – upon coming forward you will prove to the Athenians that you are deserving of being honored more than Pericles or anyone else who has ever existed and, having proved this, that you will have very great power in the city; and that if you are great here, that you will be so as well among the other Greeks … the Barbarians … Asia" (*Alc.I*, 105a-c).

Socrates was convicted of, that is, not believing in the city's gods.[81]

Socrates' playful mention of Menexenus' desire to rule, considered in connection with the proposition that those who are deemed wise or good ought to rule, warrants our reflecting on how unlikely it is that a young man could truly be wise. There are two more likely alternatives. The first is that he may merely be "deemed" wise, without actually being wise. The second, and more promising alternative, is that of a young man possessing a love of wisdom which would enable him to pursue and (possibly) acquire wisdom. Socrates hinted in the *Lysis* that Menexenus possesses the latter quality:

> I wished to give Menexenus a rest and was also pleased by that one's *love of wisdom* (213de).

On this basis, as well as Menexenus' lifelong association with Socrates - and thus philosophy - Menexenus can be seen as having some of the requisite potential to actually become wise and good. But the city requires that their rulers be deemed wise or good, which subtly calls attention both to the multitude's limited ability to assess wisdom, and the perpetual scarcity of wise men who are willing to rule. The requirement that the rulers be "deemed" wise and good reminds us that even truly wise men have a need for rhetorical skill, assuming, that is, that they wish to persuade anyone else that they possess wisdom, or that they endeavor to benefit either their friends or their fellow country men with their wisdom. This requirement does not necessitate democracy, however, it merely necessitates that whoever is to be ruled, is so with their consent - which squares with Socrates' prescriptive description of Athens as in reality an aristocracy, while in appearance a democracy. If the ruled were not persuaded of their rulers' wisdom and goodness, even the philosopher king - especially the philosopher king - could easily be mistaken for a mere tyrant.

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[81] Socrates recites three versions of these charges at *Apology*: 18bc, 19bc, 25bc.

To the extent that relaying political speeches to Menexenus constitutes a partial education in rhetoric, it is also an implicit endorsement of his suitability to rule either his father's household or the city. The oration can then be seen as a picture of the philosopher providing him with the tools (or weapons) he requires to persuade the multitude of his wisdom and goodness, and of how they should conceive their regime. Interestingly, however, in so doing the philosopher actually exerts some influence on the choice that ostensibly lies in the hands of the multitude, thereby himself contributes to transforming a democratic regime into the "aristocracy" the oration claims it has always been.[82] We should also note once again that Socrates does not require Menexenus to forego repeating these speeches himself. Actually, Socrates simply extracts a promise from Menexenus that he will not report Socrates to Aspasia for repeating them. This too may be an education in "politics" insofar as any speech received from Socrates or Aspasia (post-399 B.C. in Socrates' case) may be viewed by the "multitude" with suspicion, thus whoever repeats such speeches

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[82] Furthermore, such a scenario parallels the *Republic* insofar as it illustrates (some) political power in the hands of the philosopher, making the *Menexenus*' political world a true aristocracy – where the best, the philosopher, rules. And, if Socrates is grooming Menexenus for rule, this act could be seen as a practical portrayal of what seemed so practically impossible in the *Republic*. That is, that the "rulers" (in this case Socrates) would keep a careful watch of the children, and:

> … if from these men (farmers and craftsmen) one should naturally grow who has an admixture of gold or silver, they will honor such ones and lead them up, some to the guardian group, others to the auxiliary… (415c).

In keeping with this parallel to the *Republic*, there are interesting avenues of speculation opened by having Socrates and Aspasia produce, *together*, a rhetorical education for Menexenus. Aspasia, the courtesan of Pericles, and companion of Socrates, could be seen as a semi-mythical portrayal of what the may have a hard time being "deemed" wise and good. We can easily see why Socrates' (and his proteges) would be suspect, and likewise. Aspasia was also charged with impiety, not to mention her foreign birth.[83]

Speech and Deed

The oration begins by implicitly inviting the reader to see speech and deed as distinct:

> With respect to *deeds*, these men have received from us what befits them, for they depart on the destined journey having been sent forth as a group by the city and individually by their families. *But as for speech*, the law enjoins us to give these men the honor still due, and it is proper that we do so (236de).

However, the oration soon blurs the distinction between speech and deed in the portion quoted above. Indeed, "as for speech", it is the vehicle by which the orator, and the city as a whole, will "give these men the honor still due". Now, giving men honor is clearly a "deed" achieved by "speech", and the ostensive motive for honoring the war dead is the "*law* (which) enjoins us to give these men the honor still due ..." (236de). Now, law is a particular kind of speech, specifically designed to compel action, or "deeds". It is also this same law that compelled the "deeds" of speech that Menexenus witnessed today at the Council chamber.

There are also other "deeds" that the oration is designed to encourage and, in so doing, there are different functions or "deeds" that this *speech* is intended to perform:

> ... a finely delivered speech can instill in the listeners remembrance and honor for those who

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"sacred marriages" of Book V might look like outside the "city in speech". Is not a courtesan the practical equivalent of a *woman held in common*?

[83] Since Socrates likens himself to a foreigner at the beginning of the *Apology*, and there may be another, more subtle, way in which Socrates and Aspasia are fitting companions for one another.

> have done the deeds. Such speech must adequately praise those who have died and graciously counsel those who are living, urging children and brothers to imitate the virtue of the ones who lie before them … (236ea).

The speech, then, must dispense praise and honor, while urging others to do what earns praise and honor.[84] The special import of the relationship between speech and deed in the context of the *Menexenus* is the promotion of a particular understanding of citizenship. Now, the multitude is more inclined to honor deeds, as they appear more real, less subjective, not to mention less deceptive.[85] The problem, however, is that any given deed can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and thus there is potential for conflict and civil strife. In the course of instilling "remembrance and honor" in the listeners, the oration also seeks to communicate a harmonized interpretation of the city's history - one that will assist the reconciliation of those who have been in "strife" with one and other.[86] The first line of the oration reminds us that the war-dead have been sent forth "as a group by the city" and "individually by their families". Thus, there is a tension between the two parties that have an interest in these men. The men died for the sake of the city, but the loss will be felt most immediately by the men's families. It is crucial to the continued coherence of the regime that the survivors believe their men fought and died for the sake of protecting a city worthy of their sacrifice. But, in some instances, men died as a direct consequence of the incompetence of their commanders (for instance, under Cleon's command at Amphipolis), a fact which can be expected to nurture some resentment amongst the families of these men, which, in turn, would naturally be directed at the city, or some part of the city; thus presenting another potential source of faction.[87] In order to allay any strife that may arise from this sort of situation, the city must present herself as worthy of the men's lives, which justifies the oration's tendency to (on the surface at least) present Athens in the best possible light.[88] Further to the goal of reconciling the citizens to the city, the oration bestows honor upon the men in an effort publicly to compensate the survivors for their loss. In return for the lives they have sacrificed, the men are depicted as exhorting the city to take care of their survivors:

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[84] The theme of imitation in the dialogue deserves some exploration (i.e., the children are to imitate their fathers, Socrates imitates Pericles (and perhaps Aspasia), and Plato could be seen as imitating the poets).

[85] Likewise, in the *Apology*, Socrates comments: "I for my part will offer great proofs of these things for you – not speeches, but what *you* honor, deeds (32a).

[86] The oration is careful not to refer to civil discord as war, and this too resembles a stricture in the *Republic*: "Then when Greeks fight with barbarians and barbarians with Greeks, we'll assert they are at war and are enemies by nature, and this hatred must be called war; while when Greeks do any such thing to Greeks, we'll say that they are by nature friends, but in this case Greece is sick and factious, and this kind of hatred must be called faction" (470cd).

> … take care of our parents and sons, giving the ones a well-ordered education and nursing the others properly. But of course we know that even without our making this exhortation, the city will take adequate care (248d).[89]

One suspects these hypothesized fathers are not as confident as they may wish to sound, and incorporated in the message from them, is some advice for the city as to how she can become better. In accordance with this advice, the oration illustrates the city as willing to fill the void that was created when these families lost able men:

> …since fate has cast her without design into the role of an heir and a son to those who have died – into a

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[87] Thucydides, V.6-10.

[88] If one sees the oration as prescriptive rather than descriptive, then the oration does not actually praise the historical Athens so much as present criticisms of the city in a politically salutary way. (Much as does Rousseau in his "Letter to Geneva", *Second Discourse*).

[89] This exhortation is reminiscent of Socrates' exhortation at the end of the *Apology*, where he asks that those who voted to condemn him ought in the future to treat his sons as Socrates treated them, which is to say, try to make his sons better (41e).

> father to their sons and a guardian to their parents – our city takes complete care of all at all times. Taking these things to heart, you ought to bear the calamity more gently" (249c).

The city is thus committed to performing the tasks that the men, if they were alive, would otherwise perform. The message then outlines an education that will contribute to the future psychic health of the citizens, and thus will also contribute to overall health of the city. This is especially evident in the emphatically Socratic "exhortation" which I will examine in detail later.

We should note that the "virtue" of the war dead will, in effect, be defined by the praise and honor that the men receive. But this need not reflect the actual virtue (or lack thereof) of these specific men. At this point we might recall that Socrates, in the opening exchange, pointed out that funeral orators:

> … praise so beautifully that by giving each [man] qualities he actually possessed and even some he didn't, [they] go to every length to most beautifully embellish with their words, they bewitch our souls (234ca).

Nowhere does Socrates state or imply that he will not himself adopt the practice that he attributes to the other orators which he is about to imitate. So, if one function of the funeral speech, and especially the exhortation to virtue, is to urge the children and brothers to "imitate the virtue" of the fallen men, and if the orator may give the fallen men not only "qualities he actually possessed" but also "some he didn't", might not the orator *invent* the 'virtue' that the survivors will be urged to imitate by attributing such qualities to these men whether or not they possessed it? And thus, the children and brothers of these men may well end up imitating the version of virtue bequeathed to them by the orator, which may well be superior to whatever qualities the men actually possessed. Of course, the orator must to some extent be governed by actuality, but it seems that the mere fact that the men before them have died in the service of the city is a sufficient basis for a great deal of praise.[90] In sum, what will be imitated is not the fallen men's deeds, but the virtue implicit in these deeds, as it is interpreted for them by the funeral orator through speech.

Why Audiences Are Receptive to Funeral Speeches

> History belongs in the second place to him who preserves and reveres – to him who looks back to whence he had come, to where he came into being, with love and loyalty; with this piety he as it were gives thanks for his existence. By tending with care that which has existed from of old, he wants to preserve for those who shall come into existence after him the conditions under which he himself came into existence – and thus he serves life.
>
> -Nietzsche, Use and Abuse of History, Untimely Meditations, 3

We should, for a moment, consider the psychic state of the audience in order to see why funeral orations can be a particularly effective tool for the promotion of civic excellence. To the extent that the audience is composed of family and friends of the deceased, they are particularly well disposed to the belief that their loved ones died for a noble purpose, making a funeral oration an appropriate and effective occasion for extolling the virtues of the regime. Moreover, an audience in a state of mourning is particularly vulnerable. They are saddened by their loss, and quite willing to attach themselves to anything that alleviates their pain. The satisfaction that derives from the pride one feels when they hear something of their own being praised - their own fathers, sons, brothers, and so forth, may serve to replace that pain with a kind of pleasure. Specifically, the kind of "pleasure" that derives from one's mere association with honorable men. This may be the best that can be hoped for under the circumstances. If one is ever to reach an audience as a group, and appeal to their highest instincts, it may well be in the context of a funeral oration. Whatever prescription one might deliver, it will travel on the strength of human nature's instinct to venerate their 'own', as well as their love of honor, their instinct for the ancestral, and especially, their natural longing for hope.

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[90] The opening statement of the "exhortation" says as much: "Children, that you are of good fathers is shown by what is now before you. Though we could have lived ignobly, we instead choose nobly to die…" (246d).

It is interesting how speeches such as these can so inspire an audience to feel joy and pride in merely hearing about the great acts performed by others. We feel exalted on such occasions even though we have done nothing ourselves to merit this sense of victory. This phenomenon does, however, encourage civic bonding and a shared sense of what is honorable. It also inspires the audience (perhaps the young especially) to live up to the example set by whomever the speech honors.

In order to have the greatest political effect, the men must be spoken of as anonymous, and mourned as a group in order for the whole audience to feel compelled by the oration. A more recent illustration of the same technique arrives to us from Lincoln, who delivered an oration that bears a striking resemblance to the Menexenus' oration:

> Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.
>
> Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a potion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.
>
> But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate – we can not consecrate - we can not hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who

> struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.[91]

Although there is truth in Lincoln's assertion that it is the men that consecrated the ground with their lives, it is the speech that ensures that these men are not forgotten. And even though speeches in comparison to deeds seem somehow less remarkable, deeds are not remembered by future generations unless they are incorporated into a nation's collective mythology, and thus, psychology.

One of the most moving aspects of both the *Menexenus*' oration and Lincoln's speech, is the linking of the war dead, and the circumstances of their death, to a hope for a greater and brighter future - with the provision that this requires the audience to commit themselves to continuing the struggle to preserve whatever it is they believe the men died for. That is, they are being encouraged to see themselves as duty-bound, out of gratitude at least, but also as a manifestation of respect, to continue striving toward the goal for which the men died. In both orations, it is a continual struggle to maintain a regime that permits freedom, and the audience is encouraged to participate in an effort to prevent the men's deaths from becoming pointless - after the fact - which would be the perceived consequence of losing the larger war of which any particular battle is only a part. This sets responsibility for the preservation of the regime's ideals, as well as the justification of the men's deaths, on the shoulders of the men's surviving descendents - to be transmitted in turn to those who are yet to be born. The premise that underlies all this is the people's perception that the war in which they are engaged is a just war. In the *Menexenus*, the perception of justice derives from the autochthonicity of the city's ancestors - they did not steal the land, their ancestors were born there, and thus they have a natural claim to remain there. In Lincoln's speech, we get the sense that the men paid for the land with their lives, thus consecrating the land. Seen this way, the loss of the land, or, its being overrun by an enemy, amounts to defiling a grave – a naturally repugnant image. In both speeches, the larger war seems to be the fight for the inherently appealing principle of "freedom", and in both cases this freedom is linked to the democratic regime and the broadly appealing principle of equality. Broadly appealing in that the multitude *qua* multitude is eternally concerned with avoiding subjugation by the few – the few being those who are strongest in any meaningful respect – intelligence, military might, rhetorical ability, wealth, whatever. Men's natural desire for freedom, and their perception that it proceeds from the preservation of the principle of equality, act to justify the men's deaths in defense of a democratic regime specifically. The psychological vulnerability of those in mourning and their instinctual desire to honor the ancestral, makes the funeral oration a prime occasion for the promotion of civic virtue.

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[91] Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg address, November 19, 1863.

Funeral Speeches and The Transmission of Virtue

In the preceding sections I discussed the possibility that an orator may choose to attribute to men qualities they did not actually possess and thus shape a new vision of civic excellence. Although I discussed briefly the broader principles that are especially appealing to a democratic audience - that is freedom, and its political prerequisite, equality - the question of how an orator may determine what qualities or 'virtues' should be attributed to the men over whom he speaks is far from answered, especially if we note that there are different kinds of democracies, and they are not all equally supportive of freedom.

As concerns the principle of equality, observe that the *Menexenus*' oration does not praise extraordinary individuals, and none of the qualities it attributes to the men are qualities specific to those *particular* men; rather, they are the kinds of qualities that derive from the regime, its history, and the nurture it has provided its citizens as a group. These qualities are spoken of as if they were possessed by every man that lies before them; the oration makes no effort to discriminate amongst these men in terms of either their virtues or their vices. Not one individual is mentioned for particularly heroic feats, and the men are consistently eulogized as a group, whose excellence was apparently homogeneously distributed. The truth of this is questionable to say the least. Surely some of the men who lie before them exceeded the others, surely some died more nobly or more bravely than the others. What is noticeable by its absence is the omission of *any* distinctions among these fallen men. They are treated as if they were all good, they were all deserving of honor, and they all died in possession of an equal measure of virtue:

> It seems to me that as they were good, one ought naturally to praise them as such. And they were good because they grew from good men. Let us pay tribute first, the, to the nobility of their birth, and, second, to their nurture and education; after this let us describe the performance of their deeds, how noble and worthy a display they made of them (236eb).

This "equality in death" that the oration implicitly attributes to the men squares nicely with the "equality of birth" the oration explicitly claims all Athenians share:

> What makes our regime possible is that it originates in equality. For the other cities have been constructed from all sorts of unequal human beings, with the result that their regimes – tyrannies and oligarchies – are also unequal …Instead, our equality of birth, our natural equality, makes it necessary to seek equality under law, legal equality, and to yield to one another for no reason other than reputation for virtue and prudence (238ea).

Note that their "natural equality", derived from being born Athenians, amounts to equality of opportunity. That is, no one is to be prevented from pursuing virtue, but there is no reason to expect that everyone will do so equally successfully. Despite the oration's provisions for equality, it leaves open one avenue of legitimate competition. That is, whoever is "deemed" to be wise and good rules, and this will define the *Menexenus*' regime. Thus, the oration has subtley diminished the importance of all other kinds of competition with the sole exception of this one, the effort to be wise or good, or at the very least, be "deemed" wise or good by the multitude. The competition to be wise or good defines the aristocracy the oration attempts to promote. Likewise, minimizing the political importance of wealth discourages men from favoring oligarchy politically, or being lovers of money privately.

The *Menexenus*' Aristocratic Democracy, and its Defense Against Tyranny and Oligarchy

Quite naturally some young men *will* eventually replace their elders, become elders themselves, be replaced in their turn and so on. We are obliged to wonder how, in the face of this natural and continual succession of new rulers, does a regime maintain the continuity of character that the oration ascribes to their regime: "After all, the same regime existed then as now – an aristocracy" (238c).[92] The oration provides a plausible answer to this question when it claims their regime has one standard for rule, and it is whoever is "deemed to be wise or good". If there exists one standard, and the rulers chosen from each succeeding generation are chosen in light of this single standard, then there will exist some continuity in the regime's character through time. But, how does the multitude assess the wisdom of the competitors for rule unless they are themselves wise? And not only wise during a particular period, but consistently wise throughout the regime's existence.[93]

According to the oration, the regime has no means of assessing wisdom except the approval of the multitude: "he who is *deemed* to be wise or good [*ho doxas sophos e agathos*] has authority and rules". Thus, by the standard set-out in the oration, Cleon[94] was as wise and good as any other Athenian leader of similar popularity. All else being equal, if Cleon was as popular as Pericles, he was as wise and good as Pericles, given that the only standard by which they judge their leaders is their wisdom and goodness. Therefore, all their leaders have been chosen on the basis of this single standard, and we are obliged to conclude what is most unlikely: that all their rulers have been wise and/or good. But obviously there is a great deal of difference between the multitude "deeming" someone to be wise, and that person in fact being wise.

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[92] "Then" being when the ancestors of the dead, having been born and educated, established Athens' regime.

[93] The alternative is obedience to good laws, which is what Socrates seems to have encouraged in the circumstances surrounding "Arginusae" and "the thirty". We will discuss this matter later.

[94] See Appendix iii for a discussion of Cleon's character.

The importance of the word "deemed" (literally, "opined"; *doxasin*) cannot be overstated. In a way, it reveals a certain consistency underlying the succession of rulers through the generations. If the rulers or "caretakers" were always, one and all, truly wise and good, the regime would be ideal, even by the criteria set-out for the 'city in *logos*' in Plato's *Republic*. The alternative arrangement, where the multitude deems all their rulers to be wise and good, while it may result in inferior rule, has the benefit of being a practical, possible, and relatively stable regime. The benefit of this arrangement is that the multitude is always satisfied with its rulers, since they chose them. Such an arrangement promotes the stability of the regime itself, if not its inherent goodness or wisdom – although stability may speak quite highly of a regime, and constitute in part its claim to possessing goodness or wisdom.[95] This is one viable principle upon which it is possible to rest a regime that can remain relatively stable for centuries, a regime which the citizens approve and will thereby support and defend. Furthermore, to the extent the citizenry is able to assess wisdom and goodness, the citizenry is able to choose good rulers, and this factor is, to some extent, flexible. At the very least, it is possible to educate a citizenry about what is not acceptable. In the context of the oration, doing so would sound something like what follows:

> … no one is ever left out because of weakness or poverty or the obscurity of his father, nor is anyone ever honored for the opposites … For the other cities have been constructed from all sorts of unequal human beings, with the result that their regimes – tyrannies and oligarchies – are also

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[95] As evidence, it was a reasonably stable and prosperous regime such as this that bore the constellation of men who together constitute the golden age of classical Greece.

> unequal. They live, therefore, regarding some as slaves and others as masters ... our equality of birth, our natural equality, makes it necessary to seek equality under law, legal equality, and to *yield to one another for no reason other than reputation for virtue and prudence* (238da).

Again there is an allusion to the "seeming" of the "virtue and prudence" of the rulers – it is implicit in the word "reputation" (again, literally "opinion"; *doxe*). This points toward the regime's reliance on speech, and more specifically, rhetoric – for that is the primary way men acquire a reputation for "virtue and prudence".[96] With respect to the mention of "tyrannies" and "oligarchies", this passage may be read as pointing to two real threats to Athens' democracy, or any democracy for that matter. Practically speaking, a democracy is always poised between these two inferior regimes.

Now, the flaws of democracy notwithstanding, it does possess the benefit of encouraging public respect for "arguments" or, in other words, it can be expected to inculcate a respect for *reason* in its citizens more than most other regimes, since the means to prominence is primarily through speeches, arguments, and efforts to persuade one's fellow citizens. There is a continual risk however, that speakers will merely pander to the multitude's appetite for flattery in an effort to satisfy their own appetite for honor. This danger is alluded to in the "opening exchange" where Socrates tells Menexenus that: "when someone competes before the very ones he is praising, it is no great thing to be thought to speak well" (235d). Those orators, who are motivated primarily by their own vanity, are willing to praise the multitude for the sake of gaining esteem from the same. They do so by appealing to the vanity of the multitude, which is evidenced, to some extent, by the word "praise", insofar as "praise" is linked to flattery. In this case, the relationship between the multitude and its leaders becomes one of mutual flattery, a process which caresses the vanity of the multitude and its leaders - thereby strengthening the lower parts of the soul in both, and ultimately, lowering the overall character of the regime. Such a democracy can lead to a kind of tyranny rather than to the aristocratic democracy that the oration promotes. Therefore it is fitting that Pericles is a presence in this dialogue. According to Thucydides, he, of all Athens' rulers, was the least tempted merely to flatter the multitude and thus he is exemplar of the best democratic leader:

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[96] Some may object that "deeds" are more important than "speech" in this respect, however, deeds are all the more difficult to interpret. Especially by the multitude who cannot be aware of all the factors that comprise the context in which any given deed is performed. For the multitude to be aware of all the pertinent information surrounding a deed requires that someone inform them, which returns us to their reliance on speech. And it is not as if every individual will assess deeds without discussing their opinion of the deed with others, arguing about who's assessment is the best and so forth - again illustrating the practical political ascendance of "speech" over "deed".

> For as long as he was at the head of state during the peace, he pursued a moderate and conservative policy; and in his time its greatness was at its height … When the war broke out, here also he seem to have rightly gauged the power of his country. He outlived its commencement two years and six months, and the correctness of his provisions respecting it became better known by his death. He told them to wait quietly, to pay attention to their marine, to attempt no new conquests, and to expose the city to no hazards during the war, and doing this, promised them a favorable result. What they did was the very contrary, allowing private ambitions and private interests, in matters apparently quite foreign to the war, to lead them into projects unjust both to themselves and to their allies – projects whose success would only conduce to the honor and advantage of private persons, and whose failure entailed certain disaster on the country in the war. The causes of this are not far to seek. Pericles indeed, by his rank, ability, and known integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude – in short, to lead them instead of being led by them; for as long

> as he never sought power by improper means, *he was never compelled to flatter them*, but, on the contrary, enjoyed so high an estimation that he could afford to anger them by contradiction. Whenever he saw them unseasonably and insolently elated, he would with a word reduce them to alarm; on the other hand if they fell victims to a panic, he could at once restore them to confidence. In short, what was nominally a democracy became in his hands government by the first citizen (II.65).

Thucydides would seem to be in agreement with the Platonic Socrates on this point of flattery being a commonly exploited means to power in a democracy, hence a perennial danger to this form of regime. Pericles, having withstood this temptation, is a fitting competitor for Socrates, who was himself distinguished by his proven unwillingness to flatter the multitude even when on trial for his life. Both Plato and Thucydides choose to praise men (Socrates and Pericles respectively) who are unwilling to (merely) flatter the multitude. In so doing, each attempts to cultivate in their readers a tolerance for this kind of leader.

Chapter IV

1)Aspasia As Author

2)The Oration's Association With the Muses: Truth-telling and Public Speech.

Aspasia As Author

> … isn't rhetoric as a whole a sort of art of leading souls by means of speeches, not only in the law courts and other public assemblies, but also in private situations? [97]

Aspasia is one of only two women who enjoy prominence in the Platonic corpus.[98] This observation in itself justifies our devoting to her some special attention. The question regarding the "true" author of the oration notwithstanding, Socrates explicitly invites us to read it as if it were composed by Aspasia and merely learnt and repeated by him. There are a numerous interpretive considerations that derive from Aspasia's alleged authorship. Aspasia was a colorful character, so much so that some facts and rumors about her life would have had currency amongst Plato's Athenian readership. This is implied in the opening exchange, where Menexenus guesses that Socrates must be speaking of Aspasia, and it is made clear in the closing exchange where Menexenus states that he "knows what sort she is" (235e, 249d). In this section I will briefly recount some of the stories that would likely have been widely known in Athens, and which seem to enhance one's reading of the *Menexenus*. Finally, Aspasia is a peculiar component of the *Menexenus* precisely because she is female, and thus it is incumbent upon us to examine possible explanations for why Plato thought a woman ought to be included in this particular dialogue.

One of the first implications of Aspasia's authorship is the recognition that if the oration were actually hers, then it cannot have been tailored to suit Menexenus' character since she could not have predicted that Socrates would repeat it to him. Thus, on the surface, it seems she thought these were the "the sorts of things that ought to be said" to a general audience, although, as a woman she would never have had the opportunity to deliver the speech publicly herself. We must conclude that Socrates sees her speech as fit for public dissemination to the extent that he repeated it to Menexenus, but did not forbid Menexenus from repeating it to his friends, or even in the council chamber if he so desired.

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[97] *Phaedrus*, 261ab.

[98] The other woman, "Diotima", is spoken of in the *Symposium* and she too is only an indirect presence in that dialogue. Like Aspasia, she does not appear except through Socrates' report of her. Socrates presents both Diotima and Aspasia as his teachers.

One puzzling aspect of Aspasia's presence in the dialogue occurs in the opening exchange and is raised by Socrates' contention that Aspasia employed force to educate him: "After all, I learned it from her, and I almost caught a beating whenever I forgot something" (236c). Now, this claim certainly enhances the comic appeal of the dialogue, partially because of how unfitting it would be for Aspasia, or any woman for that matter, physically to threaten Socrates - with apparent success no less. One suspects this is not how Aspasia typically influenced Pericles. Does Socrates really wish us to believe he feared her? And thus learned from her? Socrates, the man who did not blink when confronted with the wrath of the city? The same man who states elsewhere that:

> … the free man ought not to learn any study slavishly. Forced labors performed by the body don't make the body any worse, but *no forced study abides in a soul*'"?[99]

If Socrates believed this, then is it possible to see Aspasia's use of force as a hint that her teaching (the teaching that inheres in the oration) does not abide in Socrates' soul? Moreover, there is no little irony in the idea of employing force to teach rhetoric! Is that not a situational oxymoron? Bearing in mind how unlikely, unfitting, and impractical it would be for Aspasia to threaten

Socrates with force, we ought to consider why this image is so humorous.

First, because she is a woman, it is most likely that she is significantly weaker than Socrates, and thus her attempts to threaten him physically would be futile unless he willingly submitted to such treatment. We laugh at her impotence in this regard. Secondly, it seems unfitting to approach a man of reason - *the* man of reason - with physical force rather than speech. Why is this unfitting? If nothing else, it seems inappropriate to educate human beings, having a capacity for both speech and reason, through force. Even animals, especially horses and dogs, are amenable to persuasion insofar as they are sensitive to praise and blame. Taken seriously, the image of beating Socrates, of all people, would seem barbaric, and moreover, be futile given that a rational soul may choose to defy force as readily as it can resist persuasion (evidenced by Socrates at his trial). Returning to the analogy of training animals, while "persuasion" can be effective, it is often supported by the judicious threat of force and/or pain. Like in kind to Aspasia's threats, which seem to function as terse reminders, trainers of horses and dogs commonly employ pain to "remind" an animal of how it is supposed to behave. A quick jerk of a 'choke chain' or bridle focuses the animal and goes a long way toward persuading it to be obedient. Returning to humans, if they were all, by nature, as rational as Socrates, their education would be unproblematic. Since they are not, however, a complex education is necessary, and the threat of force is sometimes a legitimate component of an effective education. Despite the futility of Aspasia's threatening Socrates, the idea reminds us of the role force might properly play in the education of most human beings. What makes this particular use of force all the more

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[99] *Republic*, 536e.

ridiculous is the implicit suggestion that Aspasia treated Socrates in the same manner a mother treats a child who misbehaves. Indeed, Socrates does sound rather childlike when he feigns that he fears his "teacher will be angry" with him if he divulges her speech (236c). But, in examining why this image is funny, we can perhaps detect some reasons why Aspasia is actually an appropriate candidate for a "teacher of rhetoric". The inappropriateness of Aspasia employing force for the sake of Socrates' education in this case, or for that matter the image of any woman employing force in an effort to educate almost any grown man, invites us to imagine the converse – that is, when *would* it be fitting? When it is both possible and appropriate for a woman to use force as a means of educating? Well, mothers come to mind, of which Aspasia was one. It is not at all unusual, nor inappropriate for mothers to routinely employ the threat of force, and occasionally force itself, when they discipline small children in their care – not only is it possible, but it may be quite necessary prior to the development of a child's rational powers and the accompanying rudimentary capacity for the use of language. Indeed, this would seem to be the only, normally occurring, context for women to use force. Ideally, by the time a child can successfully resist its mother physically, force is no longer required, he is amenable to reason, or more precisely, persuasion. As the child's overall ability to reason improves (usually evidenced by his improving ability to speak), the variety of means by which a mother can hope to govern the child increases. With maturity children become increasingly sensitive to praise and blame, and begin to comprehend the concept of reward and punishment.

These observations, deriving from an effort to uncover why the image of Aspasia using force to educate Socrates is comical, point toward a plausible explanation for why Socrates suggests that Aspasia, a woman, is his teacher of rhetoric. For these reasons, among others, women could be seen as possessing a natural aptitude, born of necessity, for persuasion. This would follow not only from their work as mothers, but also inhere in their relations with grown men. The improbability of Aspasia governing Socrates by force (or women generally governing men by force) requires us to ask how women do typically influence men. In most cases, it is through speech and other charms, and except for very exceptional cases - mostly modern and definitely unusual - it is never through force or physical intimidation.

Now, all this is further pertinent to our study because it relates to the proper use of force, which is a general theme that is threaded throughout the oration. The mention of Arginusae and the references to the "the thirty" each illustrate the improper application of force in the city. Both are occasions where the Athenian polity - in the one case a tyrannical democracy, the other a tyrannical oligarchy - employed force against her own citizens without due discretion, and both occasions prompted Socrates' public criticism of these actions (*Apology*, 32ae).

We discussed above why Socrates' would be a fitting speaker, given the contents of the oration and its relationship to how he chose to live – thus there was a congruity between the speech and his deeds. Likewise, from what we can gather in the dialogue, Aspasia also appears to support her speech with her own 'deeds'. For instance, Aspasia's son is among the war dead - he was tried and killed by the city following the battle of Arginusae. But she, rather than exhibiting hostility toward the city, instead (supposedly) composes a speech that can be expected to benefit Athens – her speech praises the city, but in so doing, it goes some way toward correcting Athens's flaws. She is thus the very image of the behavior that the oration prescribes to the fathers of the war dead:

> …he will be found neither taking joy nor grieving too much. We, for our part, esteem such [men] and wish and declare our own kin to be of this sort; and we now present ourselves as such too … we ask both our fathers and our mothers to spend the rest of their lives possessed of this same mind and to know that they will gratify us most neither by wailing nor by mourning over us …they would gratify us least by treating themselves badly … most by mourning lightly and with measure (248bc).

Aspasia is also exemplary with respect to the oration's prescription that the survivors of those who died "at one another's hands" (one of which could be her son) be reconciled with one another.

Traditionally, the function that women performed at the funerals was wailing and mourning. Thucydides tells us that: "the female relatives are there to wail at the burial" (II.34, cf. *Phaedo* 60a, 116ab). Wailing, it seems, was their function at such occasions. Insofar as wailing is an expression of the passions, and an immoderate one at that, the oration can be seen as encouraging a novel education for the women in this respect. In the *Menexenus*, we are told that a woman composed this sober speech that discourages the survivors – the wives and children – from being immoderate in their mourning. And Aspasia, if the oration she composed is regarded as depicting her over-all behavior in mourning, is exemplary for her apparent self-mastery. The loss she has suffered at the hands of Athens has not caused her to treat the city as an enemy. Given the general practice of women at the burials, it is not surprising that Menexenus remarks, "By Zeus, Socrates, this Aspasia you speak of must be blessed, if, though a woman, she is able to compose such a speech" (249d).

But we should also consider why it would not be fitting for Aspasia to deliver this oration publicly. We are led to believe that Aspasia was capable of composing this oration, and thus able at rhetoric, but yet she never became a public political figure. We might speculate that in a city that had been dominated by war for decades, traditional expressions of manliness would have been all the more appealing to men and women alike since everyone's continued survival depended on the existence of men who were willing and able warriors. That said, it is hard to imagine young men, especially those raised in a climate of war, to respect women as their rulers – they are much more likely to see the community of women as the very thing they are intended to protect: its child-bearing potential being so essential to the continued existence of the polity. In the dialogue, Socrates had to emphasize the worth of Aspasia's speech to Menexenus presumably because he would not otherwise especially desire to hear a speech she wrote: "whether you wish to give Aspasia's speech or whomever's, just speak" (236c). Although Menexenus clearly approves of the content of the oration, he remains distrustful of its alleged author, "I have met up with Aspasia many times, Socrates, and I know what sort she is" (249d). What could Menexenus have in mind when he refers to "what sort" Aspasia is?

The most obvious interpretation of Menexenus' comment is that Aspasia was an unusual woman. Aspasia, we know, was both a courtesan and a foreigner. But in light of this, we may see her as illustrating the foundations of feminine power – that is, feminine power without the benefits of conventional support such as that implicit in the institution of marriage and rights of citizenship. She is a woman 'in the state of nature' insofar as she lived outside of the conventions that normally govern, as well protect, women in a regime. She, unlike Athenian women wedded to Athenian citizens, would have had to rely exclusively upon her own devices in order to ensure her welfare. And she did so with great success; her alliance with Pericles enabled her to enjoy a privileged life, which even allowed her (if we believe Plutarch), to aid her homeland politically. Moreover, she bore an illegitimate son who nonetheless carried his father's name, which was no small advantage considering the name. This son both acquired Athenian citizenship, and acceded to the office of general. By all accounts she was a most extraordinary woman. That said, it is still worth wondering how Athenian women might have received a speech from Aspasia. Would she be an effective speaker as far as the female audience was concerned?

First of all, it is conceivable that other women would have envied her conquest of Pericles as well as the sorts of advantages this would afford.[100] Motivated by low desires as well as high, women are attracted to powerful men, and it is not likely that Pericles was an exception to this rule.[101] Some Athenian women could be expected to envy her for this reason as well as for her freedom, the same freedom that allowed her to converse with

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[100] For instance, with respect to young Pericles becoming an Athenian citizen, this was a prize that Pericles himself withheld from the sons of many other women. Plutarch tells of how Pericles, at the height of his power and in possession of legitimate sons, passed a law that strictly limited Athenian citizenship to "children lawfully begotten". As a result of this law, "There were little less than five thousand who were convicted and sold for slaves". This law was overturned after the death of Pericles last legitimate heir, so that his son by Aspasia might be made a citizen. Plutarch comments as follows:

> It looked strange, that a law, which had been carried so far against so many people, should be cancelled again by the same man that made it; yet the present calamity and distress which Pericles labored under in his family broke through all objections, and prevailed with the Athenians to pity him … they gave him permission to enroll his son in the register of his fraternity, giving him his own name (XXXVII).

This son afterward, after having defeated the Peloponnesians at Arginusae, was, with his fellow-generals put to death by the people (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, I.VII.1-25).

[101] Plutarch, XXIV.

Socrates, presumably in private. Women may also be expected to resent her out of a natural sense of xenophobia. And there are other, more obvious reasons why Athenian women, particularly married women, might resent the presence of women like Aspasia in their regime. Far from wishing to listen to, much less abide by, a speech composed by a courtesan, some women might wish to ostracize her, or at the least, actively promote the exclusion of such women and their offspring from legitimate civic life. So these are some reasons why Aspasia may not have been effective, even were she otherwise able to present her speech publicly. In sum, most men, and especially young warriors would not respect her, and most women are likely to despise and resent her. But despite this, she enjoyed the company of a few remarkable men, who thought so highly of her and her incarnation of feminine virtue that they themselves spent time in conversation with her, and some even brought their wives along to "listen to her discourse".[102] All things considered, whatever political or social influence Aspasia might have wielded, it would have been exercised in various relatively private settings - within her relationship with Pericles, *via* private conversations with Socrates, or during the course of raising her son.

Aspasia's presence in the dialogue also serves as a reminder of two other important points. The first is that there *are* women in this regime - a point that is not always foremost in the reader's mind because the oration is directed at honoring the war dead, which is to say warriors, which is to say men. But in light of the fact that Athens has lost a great many men to war in the preceding years, the surviving women can be expected to have an inordinate amount of influence on this regime's young. Indeed, the fact that Athens had lost a great number of adult men is explicitly demonstrated by the need for a funeral oration, and the numerous men the oration aims to honor. This may have made Athens particularly ripe for a novel education.

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[102] See Plutarch, *Lives*; Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, III.14.

It is notable that the 'exhortation' mentions mothers and parents numerous times since this may be interpreted as a reminder to both an Athenian audience and ourselves that women have an important role to play in this polity, particularly in their capacity as mothers.[103] It is reasonable to suppose that the continued health of the regime is intimately tied to the civic education women receive as they influence the opinions of their children. It is therefore fitting that in the 'exhortation' *both* the fathers and mothers of the war-dead are encouraged to turn their attention toward "caring for and nurturing our wives and children" (248cd). Insofar as "caring" and "nurturing" includes educating the wives and the children (of the war dead) the task of educating the citizenry is explicitly delegated to the *mothers* as well as the fathers of the war dead.[104] Furthermore, Aspasia is presented as Socrates' teacher and credited with the composition of this funeral oration. Since the latter seems to be a novel idea to Menexenus, perhaps Plato means implicitly to criticize the common Athenian practice of isolating women, and thereby excluding them from the civic education that is promulgated in public life. Moreover, Socrates explicitly encourages Menexenus to acknowledge and express gratitude to Aspasia: "What then? Don't you admire her, and aren't you now grateful to her for the speech?" (249de). To Menexenus (and Plato's readers), this suggests the possibility that women are capable of more than he had heretofore supposed.

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[103] Mothers are mentioned at 247c, 248b, 248e; wives are mentioned at 248c; "parents" are mentioned at 248cd, 248d, 248e, 248e, 249c. The latter especially emphasizes the role of women in the regime.

In the *Republic*, mothers are also credited with 'educating' their sons in a certain way. Socrates says the following with respect to the genesis of the "second man", the timocratic man:

> "When in the first place, *he listens to his mother complaining*. Her husband is not one of the rulers and as a result she is at a disadvantage among the other women. Moreover, she sees that he isn't very serious about money and doesn't fight and insult people for its sake in private actions in courts and in public but takes everything of the sort in an easygoing way; and she becomes aware that he always turns his mind to himself and neither honors nor dishonors her very much. She complains about all this and says that his father is lacking in courage and too slack, and, of course, chants all the other refrains such as women are likely to do in cases of this sort".
> "Yes, indeed," said Adeimatus, "it's just like them to have many complaints".
>
> "…His father waters the calculating part of his soul, and causes it to grow; the others the desiring and spirited parts … drawn by both these influences, he came to the middle, and turned over rule in himself to the middle part, the part that loves victory and is spirited; he became a haughty-minded man who loves honor" (549cb).

Given the potential for mothers to so corrupt their sons, it is easier to see why it is essential that they too receive a civic education that corresponds with the larger aims of the regime. That is, they ought to esteem and thus promote whatever understanding of virtue the regime means to inculcate in its citizens. In the case of the *Menexenus*, it will be the virtue that supports an aristocratic democracy, namely, moderation. Thus the 'exhortation' is explicitly directed at "mothers" and "parents".

I have argued above that there are parallels between the Athens of the oration, and the 'city in logos' of the *Republic*. Thus the question arises: how does Aspasia fit in? It is plausible to see

Aspasia as the kind of woman who would be admitted to the guardian class on the basis of their having similar qualities of soul to their male counterparts. Aspasia can be seen as such a woman. Indeed, on the basis of the information provided to us in the *Menexenus*, it seems she spends her time in much the same way as the men of the dialogue. Socrates and Menexenus, according to the opening exchange, spend their time listening to speeches and exchanging speeches. Apparently, Aspasia does the same, thus fulfilling the stricture of Book V of the *Republic*, that required women (some few women who are the women of the guardians), to "practice the same things" as their male counterparts provided their nature was suited to the thing in question (454e). And, as was argued above, a woman's nature might be particularly well-suited for persuasive speech. Indeed, it is much more plausible that some women would be suited by nature to practice speeches and the like than it is for them to be warriors – especially before the advent of technology which diminishes the importance of the physical differences between the sexes. In the historical Aspasia, we find a woman who was, in a manner of speaking, a woman who lived in common with the men insofar as she was not, through the institution of marriage, strictly bound to one particular man, and thus she was not bound to the private realm in the way a wife typically is; this, too, parallels the lives of the women as presented in Book V. Finally, if any Athenian leader could have been seen as a "guardian", would it not be Pericles? Therefore making Aspasia a natural candidate for providing the basis for a fictional female guardian by virtue of her association with Pericles– at least insofar as her nature suits her to practice the tasks of the guardians – in this case, those tasks associated, not with war *per se*, but with speech and rhetoric.[105] And, insofar as the dialogue invites us to see speech as a certain kind of weapon, or at least as armour, then Aspasia actually contributes to the defense of Athens by composing a speech that is intended to honor those who have died in Athens' defense, and thus encourage the next generation to be willing to do the same.

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[105] There also exist a couple of interesting parallels between Aspasia, and

Aspasia's presence also reminds us of the current moral climate of Athens. As evidenced in Pericles' speech, there was a great deal of freedom in Athens, and this freedom extended to some women too. Aspasia led a remarkably appealing life which many "modern women" could justifiably envy. Not only was she the erotic companion of Pericles[106], but she spent her days, much like the men of the age, exchanging speeches with the likes of Socrates. Her manner of life not only qualifies her to be seen in a limited sense as a female guardian, but must also be seen as a reminder that Athens was a *feverish* city; like our own, it contained all the temptations and freedoms inherent to a wealthy democratic state.

Spartan women. First, Spartan women were reputed to be sexually liberal, and thus Aspasia the courtesan seems to be linked them in this way. Second, to the extent that Aspasia is portrayed as attempting to rule Socrates, she parallels Spartan women as they too were reputed to rule their men. In the *Laws*, they are described as follows by 'the Athenian':

> On the contrary, half the human race – the female sex, the half which in any case is inclined to be secretive and crafty, because of its weakness – has been left to its own devices because of the misguided indulgence of the legislator. Because you neglected this sex, you gradually lost control of a great many thing which would be in a far better state today if they had been regulated by law (781).

[106] Contrary to what some may assume regarding the social status of courtesans in classical Greece, Aspasia, for one, was reputed to be exceedinglywell-treated by Pericles. Plutarch, after telling us of Pericles' separation from his wife (with her consent), says the following of Pericles: "… and himself took Aspasia, and

The Oration's Association with the Muses: Truth-telling and Public Speech

As was discussed above, during the course of the opening exchange we hear Socrates make explicit references to the effects of funeral orations upon his own memory: "…scarcely on the fourth or fifth day do I remember who I am…". And regarding his education from Aspasia, he claims, "After all, I learned it from her, and I almost caught a beating whenever I forgot something" (235b, 236c). Furthermore, the oration itself explicitly gauges its purpose as instilling "in the listeners remembrance and honor for those who have done the deeds" (236e).[107] These references may be seen as suggesting an allegorical connection between Aspasia and the Muses inasmuch as the tradition of the Muses closely associated them with the memory. Indeed, they are the product of Zeus' affair with Titaness Mnemosyne (Memory). While there is no doubt that Aspasia was a real historical figure, it seems that Plato has chosen to portray her in this dialogue as akin to the Muses, beginning with the emphasis on her apparent effects on Socrates' memory. This seeming link between Aspasia and the Muses is strengthened by 'her' oration's poetic style and historical subject matter – two of the realms traditionally supposed to be governed by the Muses.

To clarify the relationship between Aspasia and the Muses, it is profitable to look at Hesiod's description of the Muses. Here we will see some parallels between Hesiod's Muses and the 'Platonic Aspasia'. What follow are relevant excerpts from the *Theogony* and, notably, Hesiod is speaking in the first person:

> …and these were the first words of all

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loved her with wonderful affection; everyday, both as he went out and as he came in from the market place, he saluted and kissed her" (Plutarch, XXIV).

[107] Other references to the memory occur at: 238b, 239c, 241e, 243cd, 244a, 246ab, 249b. Also, the *Phaedrus* contains numerous references to the Muses and the memory too extensive to deal with here.

the goddesses spoke to me,
the Muses of Olympia, daughters of Zeus
of the aegis:
"You shepherds of the wilderness, poor fools,
nothing but bellies,
we know how to say many false things
that seem like true sayings,
but we know also how to speak the truth
when we wish to".
So they spoke, these mistresses of words,
Daughters of great Zeus …

…They breathed a voice into me,
and power to sing the story of things past.

They told me to sing the race
Of the blessed gods everlasting,
but always to put themselves
at the beginning and end of my singing.

But what is all this to me, the story
Of the oak or the boulder?
…And they
In divine utterance
Sing first the glory of the majestic race
Of immortals…

…by singing the race of human kind,
And the powerful Giants…

…They bring forgetfulness of sorrows,
and rest from anxieties…
But blessed is that one whom the Muses
love, for the voice of his mouth runs and is sweet, and even
when a man has sorrow fresh
in the troublement of his spirit
and is struck to wonder over the grief
in his heart, the singer, the servant of the Muses singing
The glories of ancient
men, and the blessed gods
who have their homes on Olympus,
makes him presently forget his cares,
he no longer remembers
sorrow, for the fits of the goddesses
soon turn his thought elsewhere.[108]

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[108] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 25-100. My emphasis throughout.

In his depiction of the Muses, Hesiod emphasizes their effect upon the memory, in particular connection with times of grief and sorrow. 'Aspasia's' funeral oration, in its capacity as an instrument of comfort to the grief stricken ("consoling fathers, mothers, and any other surviving ancestors") resembles the italicized portion of Hesiod's description of the works of the Muses.

Not only is the oration linked to the Muses by its appeal to the memory and its efforts to console, it is also linked by the method by which it does so. That is, in the oration, everything that is declared about the history of the Athenians is stated in a positive light, even those events that seem elsewhere (such as in Thucydides' account) to be at best tragic, are cast as victorious and a legitimate source of civic pride. Although some instances have already been noted, the details of these "false" aspects of the oration will be discussed further in the portion of this paper which deals directly with the oration, but for present purposes it is sufficient to point out that the oration bears a tenuous relationship with the historical truth, at least if we can consider Thucydides' account to be such.

The oration's poetic disregard for the historical truth of the events which it describes may further link Aspasia to the Muses by way of their common methods. Both the Muses and Aspasia appear to "…know how to say many false things that seem like true sayings". Furthermore, the very content of the oration, in its recount of the Athenians' struggles since time immemorial resembles the Muses' task of "singing the race of human kind … singing the glories of ancient men…". The above portion of Hesiod's *Theogony* functions as an introduction to what could be understood as a Greek "Genesis" – that portion of his writing which gives an account of the origin of all things, including the universe itself. This parallels Aspasia's oration insofar as she too offers a clearly mythical account of how humans first came to inhabit Athens. In his *Republic*, Plato quotes a portion of Hesiod's account in his own treatment of the origin of the various regimes. There, he has Socrates ask Glaucon:

> Do you know … that it is necessary that there also be as many forms of human characters as there are forms of regimes? Or do you suppose that the regimes arise *'from oak or rocks'* and not from the dispositions of the men in the cities, which, tipping the scale as it were, draw the rest along with them? (544de)

And indeed, what is the oration's depiction of the regime, upon which is based its exhortation, if not an attempt to form the dispositions of those who hear it?

In the *Menexenus*' oration, we hear an account of the origin of Athens. And just as Hesiod claims to have been told the story he recounts about the origin of the universe by the Muses, Socrates claims to have been taught the "oration" he delivers by Aspasia, this Muse-like figure. In a way, Plato has portrayed Socrates imitating Hesiod inasmuch as they both deliver mythical accounts of the ancient past in the guise of having received the content of their mythologies from females with whom they claim personal association. In both cases (Hesiod's and Socrates') it is reasonable to question whether they did not in fact write the speeches themselves. In both cases the female 'authors' are conveniently inaccessible to those who hear 'their' speeches. As such, both Socrates and Hesiod position themselves at a kind of remove from responsibility for the content of their speeches. The effect of this stylistic, or perhaps prudential choice, is that neither Socrates nor Hesiod can be directly challenged regarding their respective mythologies' correspondence with the "truth" or even orthodox opinion about the same events. After all, they are merely repeating what they have been told by others, and females at that!

But yet, their stories possess a great deal of poetic appeal, and perhaps they are repeated for the pleasure they provide rather than the literal "truth-value" of the stories they tell. This is not to say that their stories do not capture human wisdom and communicate it in the form of allegory, in which case the stories may articulate a truth of a different kind – that is, general truths about humanity as such, rather than the 'historical truth' about a particular people or a particular series of events.

As for the validity of drawing an allegorical relationship between Aspasia and the Muses, there is still more textual basis for doing so. Aspasia, like the Muses:

> …attend[s]
> on the respected barons.
> And when on one of these kingly nobles,
> at the time of his birth,
> the daughters of great Zeus cast their eyes
> and bestow their favors,
> upon his speech they make a distillation
> of sweetness.[109]

Plato's characterization of Aspasia's relationship with both Socrates and Pericles parallels Hesiod's portrayal of the Muses and their association with powerful men, these "kingly nobles", bestowing upon their speech the "distillation of sweetness" that makes rhetoric so effective. Aspasia in her capacity as courtesan may be an especially fitting source for either a funeral oration or rhetorical speech generally. Like the Muses, who according to tradition are the divine source of the finest intellectual pleasures, courtesans exist for the purpose of providing pleasure to their male companions. If we consider that rhetorical speech is typically more pleasurable than, say, philosophical speech, then an accomplished courtesan is a fitting allegorical figure for a teacher of rhetoric, even a philosopher's teacher of rhetoric. Philosophic inquiry, whatever else it may be (and no doubt it would be hard to define with precision), is presumably concerned with the truth. Therefore it must be open to the consideration of all possible truths be they pleasurable or utterly distasteful and harsh - not to mention that some truths may have positively detrimental political consequences for their purveyors. This latter consideration points to the philosopher's need for rhetorical skill if he is to cloak the products of his inquiry in a manner that renders them salutary for his general audience, yet offers a more substantial analysis to his more attentive audience. The oration is a case in point. As I shall argue in more detail later, the oration apparently praises Athens, but actually attributes to her Spartanesque qualities – thus it is really a disguised criticism of Athens and praise of Sparta. Like the courtesan, whose success depends on determining the particular tastes of her companions, the philosopher must gauge the needs of his audience; and telling them the truth about their regime need not be his foremost concern. What is more at issue is the continued psychic health and well being of the immediate survivors of the dead, as well as the continued cohesion of the polity itself.

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[109] Ibid., 80.

As I noted above, at the beginning of the oration we are reminded that there are two distinct entities which have an interest in these men: the city as a whole, which regards them "as a group", and the particular families concerned about particular men (236de). Whatever the truth about their deaths may be, the orator must consider what is appropriate for the mourners to hear so as to avoid exacerbating their loss. At the same time, the orator may reasonably be expected to encourage the continued existence of the regime.[110] Thus, in the interest of political effectiveness, the funeral oration must be guided more by considerations of pleasure and alleviating pain, than truth. Although it is true that philosophy may be pleasurable for some, that is not its governing character or purpose. On the other hand, rhetoric often does aim to praise or flatter, and thereby provide pleasure to an audience. In the case of a funeral oration, the rhetorician must be prepared to sacrifice historical truth for the sake of salutary political and psychic consequences, such as comforting those who mourn.

In the *Menexenus*, we hear that the speaker is chosen by his political rulers, the council. That Archinus and Dion are the leading candidates is likely due to their providing the most pleasant orations. The *Menexenus* leaves open the question of how the council would discriminate amongst the contending speakers, and one suspects the choice is determined in part on the basis of how the judges *feel* when the speeches are delivered. Do they feel exalted? Mesmerized? Proud? Do they like Socrates claims, feel as if they are "living on the Isles of the Blessed"? Or, as Pericles claimed to fear, are they angered?[111] The latter may occur, but chances are that *that* speaker will not be chosen, though he may well be delivering a speech that accords most closely to the "truth".[112] The recognition that the potential orators may be judged on the basis of how they make the judges *feel* links the oration, and rhetoric generally, to poetic speech and the poets. The old argument between philosophy and poetry turned on poetry's implicit appeal to the passions. Similarly rhetoric as it is usually practiced appeals primarily to the passions, and in a democratic context the dangers inherent in doing so are amplified given what sorts of appeals are most effective with most people.

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[110] Pericles, in his oration, makes explicit reference to the potential for the promulgation of civic discord that inheres in funeral speeches as such. See Thucydides, II.35.

[111] Ibid.

[112] In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates comments: "...the person who intends to be competent at rhetoric has no need at all to be concerned about the truth regarding which actions are just or good ... In court, no one cares about the truth of these matters..." (272de).

By relating Aspasia to the Muses, we may find a thread which leads toward a plausible explanation for Socrates baffling remark to Menexenus that "… perhaps you'll laugh at me if I in my old age seem still to be *playing*".[113] What can be meant here "playing"? If we pause to consult the *Republic*, we may find a clue concerning Plato's particular usage of the term "play". We shall find this clue in Book VIII, in close connection with none other than the Muses. During a discussion pertaining to the various regimes, Socrates says the following to Glaucon:

> How will our city be moved and in what way will the auxiliaries and the rulers divide into factions against each other and among themselves? Or do you want us, as does Homer, to pray to the *Muses* to tell us how 'faction first attacked', and shall we say that they speak to us with high tragic talk, as though they were speaking seriously, *playing and jesting with us like children*?" (545de).

Socrates' rendition of Aspasia's oration may be "playing" in the sense that he here, just as he offers to do in the *Republic*, adopts a certain exalted style, a certain stylistic posture that we may see as playful. It plays with the true or, at least the 'orthodox' account of the matter in question by subtly altering it. It plays with the listener's perception of the event. In so doing it plays with the audiences' understanding of the events with which it deals. Ultimately, it has the potential to 'play' with a people's perception of its past as if they were children receiving instruction through fables, thus, it has the ability to play with a people's understanding of itself. Now, not only does the oration's tone resemble "high tragic talk", but the oration, like the Muses mentioned in the *Republic*, also gives an explicit explanation of how "faction first attacked"; that is, we are told:

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[113] Socrates makes a very similar comment in the *Apology*: "For surely it would not be becoming, men, for someone of my age to come before you fabricating speeches like a youth" (17c).

> ... but when peace came and our city was honored, she became the object of that which human beings are prone to feel towards those who are successful: first emulation, and then, from emulation, envy. This pushed our city unwillingly into war with the Greeks... (242ab).[114]

In this case, the oration that Socrates attributes to Aspasia performs a function that is attributed by Plato to the Muses in the *Republic*. A further relationship between the playful style of Socrates in the *Menexenus* and the characterization of playful speech in the *Republic* occurs when Socrates declares to Glaucon:

> You are a happy one ...if you suppose it is fit to call 'city' another than such as we have been equipping ... The others ought to get bigger names ... For each of them is very many cities but not a city, *as those who play say*... (423a).

Here, "playing" is again linked to misleading speech. In this connection the oration provides an image of Athens that diminishes the fact that she is, in the terms of the *Republic*, "many" cities. Instead, the oration steadfastly presents her as "one" city, denying the severity of her internal turmoil, and emphasizing her subsequent cohesion:

> After the fighting, when there was quiet and we were at peace with everyone else, we waged our own war at home in such a way that if in fact it should be fated for human beings to endure civil strife, no city would pray to see itself act differently. For the citizens from the Piraeus and the town readily and amicably reconciled with one

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[114] In the Republic, "faction" refers to discord that is internal to the regime. Even though the oration is speaking of how Athens came to fight with the other Greeks, it nonetheless encourages us to see the Greeks as a unified community, and thus, wars between Greeks can be seen as a kind of faction, especially in comparison to the oration's attitude toward the Athenians' barbarian adversaries.

> another and, contrary to expectations, with the other Greeks as well … There is no explanation for this other than a real [*onti*] kinship, which secures, not in speech but in deed, a friendship that is steady and of the same race. It is right to remember also those who died in this war at one another's hands, and, since we have become reconciled, to reconcile them as we are able, with prayers and sacrifices on occasions such as this, praying to those who rule over them. For not out of vice did they attack one another, nor out of enmity, but through misfortune. We, the living, ourselves bear witness to this, since we, who are of their race, have forgiven one another, both for what we did and for what we suffered (243eb).

Here, figuratively speaking, the oration makes an effort to call what was in fact "many cities" – Athens, the Piraeus, and the various other factions within them "one city". The oration does so by emphasizing the citizens' reconciliation with one and other, and one way it attempts to do this is by using language that refers to *all* those who have survived as a single, whole, entity – "*we*, the living, *ourselves* bear witness to this since *we*, who are of their race … for what *we* did and for what *we* suffered…". This may constitute one of the reasons why Socrates cautions Menexenus that he may "seem to be playing", that is, he intends to offer a revised, or, to some degree poetically glorified account of Athens' history, beginning with an effort to make her appear to be "one city" and not "many cities".

Chapter V

1)The Oration and the "Noble Lie" of the *Republic*.

The Oration and the "Noble Lie" of the *Republic.*

The oration and the "noble lie" of the *Republic* share several features, beginning with the image of a particular portion of the earth bringing forth a particular race of man. The aim of both 'mythoi' seems to be the inculcation of fraternal affection amongst the citizenry of their respective polities. In the *Republic*, we are told that the inhabitants of the 'city in *logos*' are to believe that:

> …the earth, which is their mother, sent them up. And now, as though the land they are in were a mother and nurse, they must plan for and defend it, if anyone attacks, and they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth (414d).

Similarly, in the *Menexenus*, we hear:

> …thus they, the descendents, did not migrate to this country, with ancestors having come from elsewhere. No, they were autochthonos, living and dwelling in their true fatherland, nurtured not by a stepmother as others are but by a mother, the country in which they lived. And now in death, they lie in their familial places in the country that bore, nurtured and has received them back again. *It is therefore most just to honor first their mother herself, as this will be to honor at the same time the nobility of their birth* ... it is just that she be praised because in the time when the whole earth was producing and begetting the many animals, wild and tame, our own land proved to be pure, barren of the wild and savage; from among the animals, she chose for herself and bore man, who surpasses the rest in understanding and alone recognizes justice and the gods … And indeed, *our own land, our mother, provides adequate proof that she brought forth human beings. For in that time she alone first brought forth human nourishment, the fruit of wheat and barley*, by which the human race is most finely and excellently nourished, since this in fact was the animal she bore (237b-238a).

Both accounts refer to the earth as "the mother" of the citizens, and both attribute to her the role of nurturing or nursing her inhabitants. We are to understand that she provides for them their daily needs. Both accounts suggest that this provision of sustenance therefore obligates the inhabitants to defend and protect the earth as they would the human mother who bore them.

In the context of the *Menexenus*, what is the significance of echoing the "noble lie" of the *Republic*? There may be a clue in the lines leading up to the "noble lie", where Socrates says:

> Could we somehow contrive one of those lies that come into being in case of need, of which we were just now speaking, some one noble lie to persuade, in the best case, even the rulers, but if not them, the rest of the city? … Nothing new, a Phoenician thing, which has already happened in many places before, as the poets assert and have caused others to believe, but one that has not happened in our time - and I don't know if it could - one that requires a great deal of persuasion (414bc).

Now, if one purpose of the "noble lie" is the promotion of fraternal affection amongst the citizenry, it appears that the oration attempts to apply this aspect of the "noble lie" to the practical circumstances Athens found herself at the time of which the oration speaks. Athens had endured a great deal of internal strife of a kind that is never really eradicated. There will always be those inclined to democracy and those inclined to an oligarchy of some kind - whether they use these terms or not, whether they use them properly or not. That said, Athens may have been especially in need of an interpretation of her history that would aid and maintain reconciliation of the disparate parts of the city.

The idea that the Athenians came from the earth is not a contradiction of the history that had already been laid out by

Hesiod,[115] but the oration offers a novel way of interpreting the political consequences of their originating from the earth. According to the 'mythoi' of both the *Republic* and the *Menexenus*, all citizens should thereby see themselves as brothers from one mother. But in the *Menexenus*, the citizens thereby enjoy "natural" equality from which legal equality is derived.[116] Whereas the regime in the *Republic* is founded on a hierarchical class structure.

Recall that there are two distinct parts to the "noble lie", the second of which is the 'myth of the metals' which runs counter to the insistence on equality that we see in the *Menexenus*. This 'myth' accounts for the natural differences amongst people in terms of their having different metals in their souls and thereby ratifies institutionalized hierarchy of the regime. According to one scholar the "noble lie":

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[115] Hesiod, one of the first architects of the Greek religion, also employed the image of the earth as a mother, with the anthropomorphic image of "Gaia of the broad breast". She alone bore: the starry sky, the tall hills, "Without any sweet act of love she produced the barren sea..", and with Ouranos, bore the deep-swirling ocean-stream, Koios, Krios, Hyperion, Iapetos, Theia, Rheia, Themis, *Mnemosyne*, Phoibe, and "devious-devising Kronos, most terrible of her children", Kyklopes, Brotes, and Steropes, and "Arges of the violent spirit, who made the thunder and gave it to Zeus … and many more who do not need to be named (*Theogony*, 105-140).

[116] This arrangement sounds a lot like (North American) liberal democracy, and the mythology that we typically use is the explicit recognition that we are *all* immigrants of some sort, and therefore enjoy a kind of equality on that basis. A premise that led the Liberals to institutionalize this mythos as "multiculturalism" and refer to the nation as a cultural "mosaic". Of course the aboriginals cannot be included in this mythology because they are not immigrants and this difference often compels us to treat them as "nations" unto themselves, *first* nations, with their own mythologies and a "right" to self-government. This is not an ideal arrangement as it disguises a dormant fissure in our regime that would be more dangerous if the aboriginal population were more powerful. Nonetheless, it is divisive and potentially explosive – witness Oka. All this goes to show the real political significance of how a people understand themselves in terms of their "origins" and the everyday practical effects of whatever history a people believes itself heir to. There is no end to the discord yielded by conflicting ethnic "histories" regardless of whether they are real or perceived: Israel/Palestine, Kosovo, the Balkans generally, African America, the French in Canada and so forth.

> … gives divine sanction to the natural hierarchy of human talents and virtues while enabling the regime to combine the political advantages of this hierarchy with those of mobility. In the Socratic view, political justice requires that unequal men receive unequal honors and unequal shares in ruling … But in practice if inequality is an accepted principle it finds its expression in a fixed class to which one belongs as a result of birth and/or wealth, rather than virtue.[117]

I will try to show that the *Menexenus* attempts to provide a workable, practical alternative to what was achieved by the "myth of the metals" in the *Republic*. There, "mobility" was achieved by providing that:

> … the god commands the rulers first and foremost to be of nothing such good guardians and to keep over nothing so careful a watch as the children, seeing which of these metals is mixed in their souls. And, if a child of theirs should be born with an admixture of bronze or iron, by no manner of means are they to take pity on it, but shall assign the proper value to its nature and thrust it out among the craftsman or the farmers; and, if from these men one should naturally grow who has an admixture of gold or silver, they will honor such ones and lead them up, some to the guardian group, others to the auxiliary … (415ad).

This means of avoiding a rigid class hierarchy is (practically) unworkable for numerous reasons. For instance, by the time a child's nature is evident, the child and its natural parents will have established a mutual attachment which would make their separation extremely difficult and quite possibly unjust. Moreover, assigning the proper value to a single child's nature - much less doing so for all the children in the polity - would be difficult to say the least. So, concluding that the above prescription for "mobility" is unworkable, what does the *Menexenus* offer in its place? The oration's articulation of Athens' regime (whether or not it was historically accurate) tips the above prescription for "mobility" upside down, but in so doing, it creates a more practical system of "mobility". Instead of emphasizing that humans are born with radically different natures by positing the myth that different metals were mixed in the souls of the citizens at birth, which entitled them to different degrees of honor in the regime, the oration posits natural equality and derives from it legal equality:

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[117] Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, Interpretive essay, page 366.

> What makes our regime possible is that it originates in equality. For the other cities have been constructed from all sorts of unequal human beings, with the result that their regimes – tyrannies and oligarchies – are also unequal ... But since we and our people have all grown as brothers of one mother, we do not think it right to be slaves or masters of one another. Instead, our equality of birth, our natural equality, makes it necessary to seek equality under law, legal equality, and to yield to one another for no reason other than reputation for virtue and prudence (238ea).

Thus, the *Menexenus*' oration emphasizes equality, but in order that a certain *inequality* can emerge without hindrance. The oration's mechanism for "mobility" lies in the one legitimate avenue of competition, that is, the competition to be *deemed* wise and/or good. This is far more practicable than having the guardians watch the children and rearrange their position according to the metal in their souls. It is laid out as follows:

> After all, the same regime existed then as now – an aristocracy, in which at present we are living as citizens, as we have almost continually since then. Although one man calls her a democracy, another something else that pleases him, in truth she is an aristocracy with the approval of the multitude. For we have always had kings, sometimes by birth, at other times chosen. And though the multitude has control over most of the city's affairs, they give the ruling offices and authority to those who are consistently deemed to be best; and, unlike what

> happens in other cities, no one is ever left out because of weakness or poverty or the obscurity of his father, nor is anyone ever honored for the opposites. Rather, there is one standard; he who is deemed to be wise or good has authority and rules. What makes our regime possible is that it originates in equality. For other cities have been constructed from all sorts of unequal human beings, with the result that their regimes tyrannies and oligarchies – are also unequal. They live, therefore, regarding some as slaves and others as masters (238ca).

The regime articulated here is not constructed from equal human beings as it first claims. Rather, there is a legitimate hierarchy established on the basis of the multitude giving "the ruling offices and authority to those who are consistently deemed to be best" (238d).[118] The complication is that the citizens must believe in a certain equality such that the unacceptable hierarchies are not institutionalized on the basis of more obvious claims to distinction, such as age or wealth or genealogy or whatever – not really because those regimes are "tyrannies and oligarchies", and as such they are unacceptable - but because such distinctions are obstacles to the free emergence and recognition of natural virtue. The myth of equality as it is presented in the *Menexenus* is actually the means whereby the natural true aristocracy can ascend to political power. As such, it is the handmaiden of wise rule. It also serves as a check against positively bad rule, insofar as it diminishes the prominence of those unacceptable criteria, (such as wealth), which could elevate to power unacceptable rulers. The myth of equality is necessary because it mitigates against established hierarchies, and thereby supports "mobility". It demands that the multitude recognize one standard – that those who are "deemed' to be wise, and good, have authority and rule.

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[118] Insofar as the dialogue is set while Pericles lived, it is set in Athens' historical period that most closely approximated this regime, (according to Thucydides anyway).

But, is this a judgement that is amenable to democratic process? Yes and no. The multitude has no problem with deeming some to be wise, but they are often deceived and tempted toward honoring the wrong things (e.g. wealth, good looks, etc). More importantly, they usually mistake rhetoric or sophistry for wisdom, and thus choose rulers who seem to be wise, rather than are wise. But is there any way to avoid this? Are we not really confronting a different version of the paradoxical idea of philosopher-kings?

Pericles, it would seem, is a prime example of the system working well, and issuing forth an able and competent leader, with adequate concern for the common good. Cleon, however, is a reminder of the worst sort of man who can accede to power in a democracy. The key to preventing the presence of "Cleons", and encouraging the production of men like Pericles, would seem to lie in the education and nurture provided by the city, and it is on this point that Athens and the "city in *logos*" clearly differ. Democracies, which necessarily exalt freedom, are not amenable to the strict, (and seemingly unjust) arrangements that are central to the success of the "city in *logos*":

> … [the rulers] will receive in fixed installments from the other citizens a wage for their guarding, in such quantity that there will be no surplus for them in a year and no lack either. They'll go regularly to mess together like soldiers in a camp and live a life in common. We'll tell them that gold and silver of a divine sort from the gods they have in their soul always and have no further need of the human sort; nor is it holy to pollute the possession of the former sort by mixing it with the possession of the mortal sort … it is not lawful to touch gold and silver …" (416ea).

Because of these strictures, the "city in *logos*" is radically different from both the historical Athens and the *Menexenus*' 'idealized'

Athens, both of which permit the private possession of property, among other things. But the Athens of the *Menexenus*, is akin to the "city in *logos*" in its censuring the honor of wealth, its prescribing that one's wealth should not affect one's political success, and its effort to stress, in the 'exhortation', the relative unimportance of wealth. There, we are told of the moderate man, (who seems to be the closest thing to a model human we see in the entire oration), that "When his wealth and children come into being and perish … he will be found neither taking joy nor grieving too much" (248ab).

Bearing in mind these aspects of the oration's Athens, along with oration's version of the "noble lie", a generation of young men so educated and nurtured might be all the more disposed to see each other as, "brothers of one mother", and accordingly see less appeal in the competitive accumulation of wealth. As youths, they will be more concerned with gymnastic and the musical contests. Also, they need not worry about where their meals will come from, and thus poverty will not lead them toward extreme behavior in the pursuit of material possessions (C.f. 249bc). Consequently, they may more readily agree that wealth is not necessary to happiness. Taken together, the oration (which could be likened to the shepherd of the *Republic*), aims to avoid the emergence of wolves, rather than dogs, in its regime:

> Surely the most terrible and shameful thing of all is for shepherds to rear dogs as auxiliaries for the flocks in such a way that due to licentiousness, hunger or some other bad habit, they themselves undertake to do harm to the sheep and instead of dogs become like wolves" (416a).

If this education is at all successful, then the likelihood of raising a "Cleon" is diminished, and furthermore, the likelihood of a "Cleon" rising to prominence is also lessened to the extent that men, so educated, would not wish to be ruled by him, and thus, would not be likely to elect him. Now, this will by no means ensure the rule of "philosopher-kings" but it might encourage the accession of moderate rulers. Most importantly, they can be expected, as men, to exalt excellence *via* the one legitimate avenue of competition, the competition to be deemed "wise and good".

Chapter VI

1)Praising Sparta to Athens

2)The Interim Between Athens' War Against the Barbarians and Her Battles with Sparta

3)Athens' Battles with Sparta

Praising Sparta To Athens

The oration implies that the character of the nurture that the Athenian regime has provided its citizens has been fairly consistent throughout its history:

> Having thus been born and educated, the ancestors of the men lying here lived in a regime they established, which it is correct to recall briefly. *For it is the regime that nurtures human beings*, a noble regime, good ones, the opposite, bad ones. Thus it is necessary to show that those who came before us were nurtured in a noble regime, on account of which they were good, as are men now, including these who have died. After all, the same regime existed then as now …an aristocracy with the approval of the multitude (238bd).

The regime nurtures the citizens, and their regime has existed "almost continually" since time immemorial. It is properly called an aristocracy. This claim is in stark contrast to Thucydides' account of Athens' history. Therein he describes her first regime as quite the opposite of an aristocracy:

> …But at last a time came when the tyrants of Athens and the far older tyrannies of the rest of Hellas were, with the exception of those in Sicily, once and for all put down by Lacedaemon (I.18).

According to Thucydides, Athens finds her origin not in an "aristocracy", but in a *tyranny*. And even more surprising, Athens escaped this original tyranny with the assistance of Lacedaemon! Nothing could be further from the oration's exoteric description of both Athens' founding, and the Spartans' role in securing freedom for the Greeks generally. The oration appears to be recasting Athens as her own liberator, as a prelude to claiming for Athens Sparta's reputation as 'liberator of the Greeks'. If future Athenians come to believe that this special "aristocracy", an aristocracy "with the approval of the multitude", has been their way of life since time immemorial, they will be the more predisposed to protect it as their own, and its continued survival will become a concern of the multitude when they engage in the process of assessing their rulers.

We are also presented with an example of the oration attributing to Athens a characteristic that is famously associated with Sparta: the idea that Athens has enjoyed the same regime (almost) since time immemorial. As Thucydides describes the *Lacedaemonian* regime:

> … Lacedaemon; for this city though after the settlement of the Dorians, its present inhabitants, it suffered from factions for an unparalleled length of time, still at a very early period obtained good laws, *and enjoyed a freedom from tyrants which was unbroken*; it has possessed the same form of government for more than four hundred years, reckoning to the end of the late war, and has thus been in a position to arrange the affairs of the others states" (I.18).

Indeed, Sparta was in a position to arrange "the affairs" of other states, precisely because she had a record of avoiding tyranny – a claim which the historical Athens can not match. However, by attributing this characteristic of the Spartan regime to Athens, the oration subtly speaks well of the "Spartans before Athenians". Recall that this was merely the first time that the Spartans saved Athens from tyranny, the second time occurred in Socrates' lifetime when Pausanias aided the reconciliation of the warring factions in 403 B.C., when the rule of 'the thirty' was brought down. This reconciliation, expedited by a Spartan, is also given high praise in the oration:

> For the citizens from the Pireaus and the town readily reconciled with one another and, contrary to expectations, with the other Greeks as well, and they settled the war equitably with those from Eleusis. There is no explanation for this other than

> a true kinship, which secures, not in speech but in deed, a friendship that is steady and of the same race. It is right to remember also those who died in this war at one another's hands, and, since we have become reconciled, to reconcile them as we are able with prayers and sacrifices on occasions such as this, praying to those who rule over them (243ea).

It was also Pausanias, in conjunction with fifteen other Spartans, that allowed those men who were associated with the tyranny but now had cause to fear the multitude (led by Thrasybulus) to leave the city and settle at Eleusis. What the oration describes as settling "the war equitably with those from Eleusis", may be misleading. In fact, by 401 B.C., these men at Eleusis were known to be hiring mercenary troops with the intention of returning to Athens. When this was discovered by the Athenians, they:

> … took to the field with their whole force against them, put to death their generals when they came for a conference, and then, by sending to the others their friends and kinsmen, persuaded them to become reconciled.[119]

We may gather that the oration, by describing these events as generally equitable, views the Athenians' actions as an appropriate use of force, in the service of the continued stability of the reinstated democratic regime. Notably, this act can be understood as a defensive measure, a 'preemptory strike' as it were.

With respect to Marathon, the oration gives the highest praise to the Athenian contribution to the battle, which is in keeping with other accounts of the battle. But the Spartans are praised insofar as they are pointed to as the only other Greeks who were willing to fight, which is to say they were the only other Greeks that showed sufficient courage:

> … none of the Greeks came to the assistance of either the Eretrians or the Athenians – except the

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[119] These events are described by Xenophon, *Hellenica I*, II.38-43.

> Spartans, and they arrived the day after the battle;
> all the rest were panic-stricken and, loving their
> present safety, kept quiet (240cd).

Granted, this is not unequivocal praise, but the oration is confined to some extent by the historical events as they were believed to have occurred. That said, the oration could have chosen to suggest that the Spartans arrived late out of cowardice, but it does not. And further, the oration does choose to liken the Spartans and the Athenians to one another by emphasizing their common possession of a great courage that far outshone all the other Greeks. In so doing, the oration implicitly elevates the Spartans and the Athenians together, as the most courageous of the Greeks. The oration does so despite the fact that, according to Herodotus, the Plataeans actually formed the left wing, and are described as having contributed (practically) equally to the victory at Marathon.

At 241c, the oration begins to blur the distinction between the Athenians' and Spartans' respective contributions to the defense of Greece against the Persians. Indeed, it is not at all obvious that the oration is referring solely to the Athenians, because they are never mentioned by name. Instead, it merely refers to "those" at Marathon (and this could include the Spartans because, we are explicitly told, they did show up) who proved to the Greeks that it "was possible to fight off the Barbarians, even with few against many" (241ab). But the Greek victory at Marathon so inflamed King Darius, and against the Athenians specifically, that he "became more eager than ever to lead an army against Greece" and proceeded with his preparations. Here the oration mentions "the King", which makes it appear we are still speaking of Darius (241d). In fact, Darius had died while preparing to return to Greece and his appointed heir, Xerxes, led the Persians back to Greece and fought at Salamis and

Artemisium.[120] Notably, they acquired some Greek assistance: "The Greeks dwelling in Thrace, and in the island off the coast of Thrace, furnished to the fleet one hundred and twenty ships; the crews of which would amount to 24,000 men". Altogether, some 300,000 Greeks assisted King Xerxes.[121] According to Herodotus, King Xerxes brought 2,641,610 fighting men, and, including supply staff (etc.), over five million men as far as Sepias and Thermopylae.

The next battles that are mentioned are those of Salamis and Artemisium. In Thucydides, it is clear that the Lacedaemonians also fought at Artemesium[122], and with respect to the allied Greek force at Artemesium, it is worth quoting Herodotus at some length:

> The Greeks engaged in the sea-service were the following. The Athenians furnished a hundred and twenty-seven vessels to the fleet, which were manned in part by the Plataeans …the Lacedaemonians with ten …The total number of ships thus brought together, without counting the penteconters, was two hundred and seventy-one; and the captain, who had the chief command over the whole fleet, was Eurybiades the son of Eurycleides. He was furnished by Sparta, since the allies had said that, *"if a Lacedaemonian did not take the command, they would break up the fleet, for never would they serve under the Athenians*".[123]

Thus, it is somewhat of an understatement to say the Lacedaemonians participated in this venture. While it is true they contributed fewer ships, they nonetheless supplied the commander so crucial to the support of the allies. Of "those" who fought these battles, the oration states:

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[120] Ibid., VII.1-5

[121] Ibid., VII.185

[122] See Thucydides, III.54

[123] I have omitted a lengthy list of contributing cities. Herodotus' *Histories*, VIII.1-2

> … it is fitting to praise the men who fought the sea-battles at that time, because they dispelled the Greeks' second fear, relieving them of the fright inspired by a great number of ships and men (241b).

It praises *all* the men that partook in these battles, and this must include the Spartans, along with their commander, Eurybiades. It is also reasonable to believe that an Athenian audience would be aware of all this since it is clearly described in Herodotus' famous history. Thus, the oration actually praises the combined efforts of the Spartans and the Athenians, insisting that it is *fitting* to praise these men - without distinguishing between the various Greeks that were present. There can be little doubt then, that in this case the oration means to praise the Spartans.

Now the oration turns to the "deed at Plataea", which we are told was: "third both in order and in virtue in securing the safety of Greece", and was a "common venture now of Spartans and of Athenians" (241d). Although third in order and virtue:

> …[the] threat all these men fought off was the greatest and most difficult, and for their virtue they are praised now by us, as they will be by future generations (241cd).

Since the oration explicitly mentions that this battle was a common effort of the Spartans and the Athenians, and that *all* these men deserve praise, now and in the future, it is clear that here again the oration means to praise the Spartans, and thus that the oration aims at fulfilling the harder rhetorical task that Socrates mentioned in the opening exchange:

> Now, if one should have to speak well … of Spartans before Athenians, then one [would] have to be a good rhetorician to persuade and gain esteem (235d).

As for the oration's assertion that the threat these men fought off was the *greatest*, it could be that Herodotus' description of these events provides a plausible explanation for what the "threat" in question was. Prior to the battles of Plataea, the Persian and Greek forces were lined up against one another, on either side of the nearby river Asopus. We are told, "The Greek army, therefore, which mustered at Plataea, counting light-armed as well as heavy-armed, was but eighteen hundred men short of one hundred and ten thousand …" (IX.30). Herodotus goes on to give a lengthy account of how the armies were configured toward one another, for instance, we are told Mardonius (the Persian commander), "took care to choose out the best troops to face the Lacedaemonians, whilst against the Tegeans he arrayed those on whom he could not so much depend" (IX.31). A point which suggests that the Athenian victory at Marathon notwithstanding, the Lacedaemonians were still regarded as the most formidable of the Greeks. Herodotus then lists the nations that were marshaled together against Greeks, and concludes the list as follows:

> The number of the barbarians, as I have already mentioned, was three hundred thousand; *that of the Greeks who had made alliance with Mardonius is known to none*, for they were never counted: I should guess that they mustered *near fifty thousand strong* (IX.32).

Now, not only were the Greeks vastly out numbered, but, ranged against them, instead of fighting alongside them, were fifty thousand Greeks – a substantial number. It could be that it was *this* that was the "greatest" and "most difficult" threat that was fought off at Plataea. In support of this thesis, the oration follows its mention of Plataea, with the following statement: "But after this many Greek cities were *still* siding with the Barbarian", the phrasing of which suggests that essentially the real threat at Plataea was the fact that Greek cities were allying themselves with the Barbarians in vast numbers.

Although greatly outnumbered, the Greek coalition was victorious. However, the means by which they won further supports the view that division and mixed loyalties amongst the Greek cities was the real problem. What is most notable about Herodotus' account of Plataea is the story of a Greek (in the employ of the barbarians) who stole away in the night to warn the Greeks of the impending barbarian attack. The story is worth quoting at some length:

> As soon then as there was silence throughout the camp, - the night being now well advanced, and the men seeming to be in their deepest sleep, - Alexander, the son of Amyntas, king and leader of the Macedonians, rode up on horseback to the Athenian outposts, and desired to speak with the generals. Hereupon, while the greater part continued on guard, some of the watch ran to the chiefs, and told them, "There had come a horseman from the Median camp who would not say a word, except that he wished to speak with the generals, of whom he mentioned the names."
>
> They at once, hearing this, made haste to the outpost, where they found Alexander, who addressed them as follows: - "Men of Athens, that which I am about to say I trust to your honour; and I charge you to keep it secret from all excepting Pausanias, if you would not bring me to destruction. Had I not greatly at heart the common welfare of Greece, I should not have come to tell you, but I am myself a Greek by descent, and I would not willingly see Greece exchange freedom for slavery. Know then that Mardonius and his army cannot obtain favorably omens; had it not been for this, they would have fought with you long ago. Now, however, they have determined to let the victims pass unheeded, and, as soon as day dawns, to engage in battle … If ye prosper in this war, forget not to do something for my freedom; consider the risk I have run, out of zeal for the Greek cause, to acquaint you with what Mardonius intends, and to save you from being surprised by the barbarians. I am Alexander of Macedon."

> As soon as he had said this, Alexander rode back to the camp, and returned to the station assigned him (IX.44-45).

This story certainly exemplifies the Greek 'nationalism' that is impressed upon the audience throughout the oration. For instance, the forefathers of Athens believed: "that it is necessary on behalf of freedom to fight both Greeks on behalf of Greeks, and Barbarians on behalf of all the Greeks" (239b). Later, it is said of "our city", that "she could not bring herself to help the King", or, again in "our city", "we are by nature barbarian hating because, unmixed with Barbarians, we are purely Greek" (245ad). Alexander, it would seem, is an exemplification of these sentiments.

Following Alexander's warning, Herodotus portrays the Spartans and the Athenians acting in perfect cooperation; indeed, the Spartans yield to what they regard as Athens' military superiority. Pausanias is recorded as saying:

> …it were well that you Athenians should stand opposed to the Persians, and we Spartans to the Boeotians and other Greeks … for you know the Medes and their manner of fight" (IX.46).

Amidst some confusion, it turned out that the Spartans fought the Persians, and the Athenians fought the Greeks who had allied with the Persians. Both the Spartans and the Athenians were victorious, and subsequently "the Greeks", resolved to threaten Thebes with war unless she turned over the men who encouraged Greek alliance with the barbarian. [124] All the men who thus came into Pausanias' possession were taken to Corinth and slain. This final act was performed in the hope of enforcing unity amongst the Greeks against the barbarian, and as at Plataea, this was a common effort of the Spartans and the Athenians. The prominence that Herodotus grants the issue of Greeks siding with the barbarian in his report of the "deed" at Plataea makes it seem likely that Plataea could be used as an exemplification of the divisions among the Greeks, and of the joint efforts of the Athenians and the Spartans to eradicate these divisions. Their combined attempt to unite the Greeks may have been the deed at Plataea which the oration especially praises, and refers to as the "threat" which was "the greatest and most difficult".

Having thus reached a poetic height with the deed at Plataea, the oration now leaves off implicitly praising Sparta. Nevertheless, later, it will praise 'Spartanesque' qualities, and much of what is praised in the oration are actually qualities that might easily derive from Sparta's traditions rather than Athens'.

The Interim Between Athens' War Against the Barbarians, and Her Battles Against Sparta

With respect to Athens' history following the battles against the barbarians, the oration is both brief and misleading. The oration states that after Plataea, "many Greek cities were still siding with the Barbarian", and goes on to relate the events that really constituted the growth of the Athenian empire. Rather than describe them as such, however, the oration briefly mentions the men who fought the sea-battle at Eurymedon, marched at Cyprus, and who sailed to Egypt, and points to the incidental effect these campaigns yielded, not with respect to the Athenian empire, but with respect to the King:

> It is right to remember and be grateful to them, for they frightened the King into turning his mind toward his own safety and away from plotting the destruction of the Greeks (241e).

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[124] *Histories*, IX.86-88.

Acts which were arguably offensive in nature are thus recast in terms of the defensive benefits they yielded against the barbarian – and it is specifically for this, rather than their contribution to the empire, that these men are to be remembered and for which their descendents ought to be grateful.

Thucydides, by contrast, claims of the same period: "the history of these events contains an explanation of the growth of the Athenian empire" (I.97). He further argues that, ultimately, this was the real cause of the erosion of friendly relations between the Spartans and the Athenians, and which subsequently led to war:

> The real cause I consider to be the one which was formally most kept out of sight. The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable (I.23).

In keeping with Thucydides' assertion, the oration also keeps the "real cause" of friction between Athens and Sparta out of sight. With respect to the "Delian league", the confederacy with whom Athens undertook these campaigns, the Athenians originally acceded to command of this alliance after they returned from Cyprus, when Pausanias was relieved of his command, and replaced by the Athenians, by common consent of the members.[125] It was not long afterwards that the Athenians themselves angered some of the members: "in some respects the Athenians were not the old popular rulers they had been at first" (I.97). Because Athens was willing to fight while other members wished to "avoid leaving" their homes, "Athens was increasing her navy with the funds which they contributed, [and] a revolt always found them [the subject cities] without resources or experience for war" (I.99).

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[125] See Thucydides, I.94-97 for details about Pausanias' decline, and Athens' ascension.

This meant that Athens was able to *enforce* membership in the league as well as forcibly extract tribute from the member states, lending her some of the aspects of a tyrant (as Pericles openly states). The acts of the Delian league under Athens' guidance, such as those mentioned in the oration, soon rendered tenuous her relationship with Sparta. Although the oration refers to these acts as if they were motivated by the King's plan to renew his attack on the Greeks, Thucydides hints that this was only the ostensible motive:

> ..their *professed* object being to retaliate for their sufferings by ravaging the king's country. Now was the time that the office of 'Treasurers for Hellas' was first instituted by the Athenians... (I.97).

Since Thucydides claims that retaliation against the king was only Athens' "professed" object, he implicitly raises the question of what her real object was. His mentioning the office of 'Treasurers for Hellas' immediately thereafter suggests that the treasury was in fact the Athenians' real object (I.96).

In the context of the notion of praising Athenians to Spartans, or Spartans to Athenians, Thucydides recounts a pertinent example of the former. Prior to the outbreak of the war, the Corinthians appealed to the Lacedaemonians for assistance against the Athenians on a matter concerning Corcyra. Some Athenian envoys happened to be present, and spoke to the assembly on behalf of Athens. Their speech exhibits what was probably the Athenians' common understanding of the growth of their empire. What is pertinent to the *Menexenus* is their insistence that Athens' had acted justly in the acquisition of her empire:

> We also wish to show on a review of the whole indictment that we have a fair title to our possessions, and that our country has claims to consideration. We need not refer to remote

> antiquity: there we could appeal to the voice of tradition, but not to the experience of our audience. But to the Median war and contemporary history we must refer although we are rather tired of continually bringing this subject forward … That empire we acquired by no violent means, but because you were unwilling to prosecute to its conclusion the war against the barbarian, and because the allies attached themselves to us and spontaneously asked us to assume the command (I.73).

Immediately after the envoys complete their speech, Archidamus, the Lacedaemonian king, gave a speech that contained the following comment in reference to the envoys' speech: "They said a good deal *in praise of themselves*, but nowhere denied that they are injuring our allies and Peloponnese" (I.86). Socrates is quite right: it is hard to praise Athenians to Spartans and gain their esteem. Archidamus soon called a vote, and the Lacedaemonians voted to declare war on Athens.

What is crucial to our interpretation of the *Menexenus*, however, is the envoys' assertion that they justly possess their empire, and that instead of appealing to "remote antiquity" for proof of this claim, they are instead appealing to contemporary history, which is within the experience of the audience. The *Menexenus*' oration, by contrast, does the reverse. It posits a claim to the land they have traditionally occupied by virtue of its version of the 'noble lie' which does indeed appeal to "remote antiquity". And by appealing to "remote antiquity" the oration appeals to the Athenian possessions prior to her acquiring the empire – thus the oration does not assert that Athens justly possesses her empire, but that she justly possesses her ancient lands. The oration is silent on the matter of the justness of the empire and this in itself is a tacit indictment of the empire. By appealing to recent history, the envoys are defending her recent acquisitions which necessarily include her imperial holdings. Moreover, the oration explicitly states that it *will not* speak about contemporary history: "But what need is there to speak at length about this? For I would be speaking neither of ancient men nor of things that happened long ago" (245a). Together, it would seem that the oration disagrees with the envoys' perception of the justice of the Athenian empire, and instead, sees Athens' ancient possessions as those which are legitimately defended. This point has a larger significance that is best laid out by Leo Strauss as follows:

> There is no relation of man to man in which man is absolutely free to act as he pleases or as it suits him. And all men are somehow aware of this fact. Every ideology is an attempt to justify before one's self or others such courses of action as are somehow felt to be in need of justification, i.e., as are not obviously right. Why did the Athenians believe in their autochthony, except because they knew that robbing others of their land is not just and because they felt that a self-respecting society cannot become reconciled to the notion that its foundation was laid in crime?[126]

The oration's appeal to the "autochthony" of the city's ancestors, which legitimates her ancient holdings, but not those she acquired in her rise to empire, along with the oration's omission of any explicit reference to, not to mention honor of, imperial Athens, together suggest that the Athenian empire was indefensible in terms of justice.

Athens' Battles Against Sparta

Now, as the oration turns to a discussion of the battles between the Spartans and the Athenians, it claims that *envy* "pushed our city unwillingly into war with other Greeks" (242a).

The claim that the Athenians went to war with the other Greeks unwillingly supports the oration's overarching emphasis on Greek unity. The first battle between the Spartans and the Athenians occurred at Tanagra, where the Athenians supposedly fought "on behalf of Boeotian freedom" (242b). In Thucydides' description of this event, the Athenians were not victorious on the third day, but rather, they returned sixty-two days after the battle and defeated the Boeotians (I.108). Rather than liberating the Boeotians, Thucydides tells us the Athenians "became masters of Boeotia and Phocis" (I.108). It is possible to reconcile the claim that they fought on behalf of Boeotian freedom, and the seemingly contradictory claim that they became masters of Boeotia, if we see liberation and democracy as effectively one and the same. The oration gives these men the high distinction of being "the first after the Persian war to become good men and to free those whom they were helping" (242bc). Now, on the surface it is not obvious why they are entitled to such a distinction. One plausible explanation for this honor is their success in maintaining democracy in Boeotia on the one hand, and fending off an oligarchic revolution in Athens on the other. Indeed, Thucydides tells us that the Lacedaemonians:

> ...resolved to remain in Boeotia, and to consider which would be the safest line of march. They had also another reason for this resolve. Secret encouragement had been given them by a party in Athens who hoped to put an end to the reign of democracy and the building of the Long Walls (I.108).

Thus, the victory in Boeotia, insofar as it contributed to the defense of Athens' democracy, can be regarded as an effort in defense of freedom (as it is tacitly understood in the context of the oration).

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[126] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, page 130.

The oration now turns to the battle of Sphacteria, (also known as "Pylos"), where the Athenians defeated the Spartans and happened to acquire a number of Spartan hostages who had been trapped on an island. Here, the oration goes to great lengths to portray the Athenian warriors as having acted with moderation toward their Spartan enemies out of some kind of natural affinity for other Greeks. With respect to this incident, the oration's account, once again, contrasts markedly with that of Thucydides', who portrays the Athenians as emboldened and thus immoderate as a consequence of her victory at Sphacteria (which was partially attributable to good fortune).[127] And again, in this passage the oration can be interpreted as portraying Athens' behavior as akin to the warriors of the 'city in logos', who as a matter of policy are taught to be moderate against Greek enemies. There, in conversation with Glaukon, Socrates asks:

> First, as to enslavement: which seems just, that Greek cities enslave Greeks, or that they, insofar as possible, not even allow another city to do it but make it a habit to spare the Greek stock, well aware of the danger of enslavement at the hands of the barbarians?"
> Glaukon: "Sparing them," he said, "is wholly and entirely superior" (*Republic*, 469bc).

In keeping with this prescription for the warriors of the *Republic*, the oration claims of Athens:

> Having it then in their power to destroy them, they nevertheless spared and returned them, and made peace. They believed that whereas they ought to wage war against the Barbarians all the way to destruction, they should fight those of their own race only to the point of victory, and should not let the anger of a single city destroy the community of the Greeks (242cd).

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[127] For details about Thucydides' account, please see appendix iii.

The oration has telescoped the time between the battle at Tanagra, which occurred in 457 B.C., and the battle at Sphacteria which occurred in 425 B.C. In the intervening years the Peloponnesian war had begun, and numerous battles had been fought. By 425 B.C., Greece was enduring the seventh year of the Peloponnesian war. Thus, it is most surprising to speak of such a thing as the "community of the Greeks" with respect to this period of Greek history. What's more, the oration claims that the Athenians spared the Spartan hostages and "made peace". Thucydides, by contrast, tells us that when the Spartans sent envoys to negotiate the recovery of the prisoners from Pylos, the Athenians refused their requests:

> The Athenians, however, kept grasping at more, and dismissed envoy after envoy without their having effected anything. Such was the history of the affair at Pylos (IV.41).

Although it is true that the Athenians spared the lives of their Spartan hostages, and eventually "made peace", they were not willing to do so until Athens herself had suffered a disastrous defeat at Delium in the tenth year of the war, three years after the hostages were acquired .[128] Moreover, it is somewhat misleading to suggest that what occurred was "peace" at all, given that the Peloponnesian war would actually continue for another seventeen years.

In sum, this portion of the oration produces the effect of recasting Athens' history as one of moderation rather than avarice. It would seem that the oration's assertion that Athens "made peace" is not a description of what she did, but might be seen as a commentary on what she should have done when a treaty was offered to her by the Lacedaemonians:

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[128] This was the battle of Delium. See Thucydides. V.15.

> The Lacedaemonians accordingly invite you to make a treaty and to end the war, and offer peace and alliance and the most friendly and intimate relations in every way and on every occasion between us; and in return they ask for the men on the island, thinking it better for both parties not to stand out to the end … (IV.19).

In Athens, the most vocal opponent to accepting the Lacedaemonians' offer was Cleon, who (Thucydides tells us) persuaded the Athenians to answer with a series of excessive demands (IV.21). When the Lacedaemonians suggested they negotiate quietly, Cleon "violently assailed them" and further heightened the hostilities between the warring cities with his claim that "he knew from the first that they had no right intentions" (IV.22). In the oration, we are told that the Athenians "made peace" because they believed they should "not let the anger of a single city destroy the community of the Greeks" (242d). In the context, it is unclear which city's anger is at issue, but, it is at least conceivable that the oration here refers to Sparta, and her (justifiable) anger at Cleon's public maltreatment of her envoys. Not only did he decline out of hand her overtures for peace, but he did so publicly, in a most humiliating manner, with the apparent intention of further inciting the anger, not to mention hubris, of the Athenian multitude. Cleon's prominence in Athens marks a low point in her history, and stands in contrast to a leader of Pericles' caliber. Unlike Pericles, who could in fact lead the multitude, rather than be led by them, Cleon was a slave to his desire for public honor, and thus merely pandered to the multitude's lower desires. Thucydides recounts that later the Athenians would "repent having rejected the treaty", and that Cleon would perceive that the multitude resented his advising them against accepting the treaty (IV.27). [129]

Immediately after mentioning the battle of Sphacteria, the oration makes the following claim of the Athenians:

> They believed that whereas they ought to wage war against the Barbarians all the way to destruction, they should fight those of their own race only to the point of victory, and should not let the anger of a single city destroy the community of the Greeks (242cd).

This is merely one element of the larger theme of Greek solidarity that is threaded throughout the oration. It appears again later when the oration claims of Athens that she "helped the Greeks herself and freed them from slavery, so that they were free until they enslaved themselves again"(245a). And again, this description does not accord with other accounts of the Athenians so much as it does with accounts of the Spartans. For instance, Xenophon describes the attitude of Callicratidas, commander of the Spartan fleet,[130] who declared to the Greeks that they:

> … were in a sorry plight, toadying to barbarians for the sake of money, saying that if he reached home in safety he would do his best to reconcile the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians…(I.VI.4-8).

Later, after defeating the Athenians in battle, Callicratidas again exhibits the general (nationalist) sentiments of the oration:

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[129] Thucydides' description of the events which followed depicts Cleon's desperate attempt to accommodate himself to the Athenians' lower appetites, and incite them to a new expedition for the sole purpose of regaining their favor:

> …Aware that he would now be obliged either to say what had been already said by the men whom he was slandering, or be proved a liar if he said the contrary, he told the Athenians, whom he saw to be not altogether disinclined for a fresh expedition, that instead of sending commissioners and wasting their time and opportunities, if they believed what was told them, they ought to sail against the men (IV.27).

> but all the captives Callicratidas assembled in the market place; and when his allies urged him to sell into slavery the Methymnaeans as well as the Athenians, he said that while he was commander no Greek should be enslaved if he could help it (I.VI.8-19).

In my studies thus far, I have encountered no comparable stories about any Athenians refusing to enslave other Greeks, and therefore I have concluded that this characteristic was more closely associated with the Spartans than with the Athenians. Later, when Lysander subdued Lampsacus in 405 B.C., Xenophon tells us that he "let go all the free persons who were captured" (II.I.18-25). Indeed, Xenophon also describes Lysander endeavoring to punish and thereby make an example of one Athenian commander named Philocles for committing particularly heinous acts (against other Greeks) in war. This follows another Spartan-led victory over the Athenians:

> After this Lysander gathered together the allies and bade them deliberate regarding the disposition to be made of the prisoners. Thereupon many charges began to be urged against the Athenians, not only touching the outrage they had already committed and what they had voted to do if they were victorious in the battle, - namely, cut off the right hand of every man taken alive, - but also the fact that after capturing two triremes, one a Corinthian and the other an Andrian, they had thrown the crews overboard to a man. And it was Philocles, one of the Athenian generals, who had thus made away with these men. Many other stories were told, and it was finally resolved to put to death all of the prisoners who were Athenians, with the exception of Adeimantus, because he was the one man who in the Athenians Assembly had opposed the decree in regard to cutting off the hands of captives; he was charged, however, by some people with having betrayed the fleet. As to Philocles, who threw

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[130] Callicratidas succeeded Lysander as commander in 406 B.C. (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, I.VI.I).

> overboard the Andrians and Corinthians, Lysander first asked him what he deserved to suffer for having begun outrageous practices towards Greeks, and then had his throat cut (II.I.28-32).

It thus appears that the Athenians had become the most volatile, brutal, and hence the most barbaric of all the Greeks. The Spartans, by contrast, are portrayed (outside of the *Menexenus*) as the true 'educators' of the Greeks - with respect to moderation in war at any rate. Insofar as we see the Spartans as such, they appear to bear a more significant resemblance to the 'city in *logos*' than do the Athenians.

The oration next praises the "many good men" who died in battles around Sicily, where, we are told, they fought for the freedom of the Leontines, "whom they were helping in keeping with their oaths" (242ea).[131] This campaign ended in disaster for the Athenians - 40,000 of whom would not return from Sicily. The oration makes a puzzling comment with respect to these men, namely, that these men "received more praise for prudence and virtue from the very enemies who fought them than other men receive from their friends" (243a). It is possible that the oration here refers (in part) to the events surrounding Alcibiades who, though one of three generals sent on the Sicilian campaign, would be indicted *in absentia* by the Athenians on charges of impiety and "the affair of the mysteries"[132]. Consequently, Alcibiades would flee to the Peloponnese and assist the Peloponnesian war effort. Thucydides portrays Alcibiades giving his own account of motivations underlying Athens' expedition to Sicily, which is quite different from that presented by the oration:

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[131] This reference to the Athenians honoring their oaths is in keeping with the oration's general appeal to the Athenian audience's sense of honor. See 236e, 242a, 242c, 247b, 248c, 249b.

> We sailed to Sicily first to conquer if possible, the Siceliots, and after them the Italiots also, and finally to assail the empire and city of Carthage. In the event of all or most of these schemes succeeding, we were then to attack Peloponnese, bringing with us the entire force of the Hellenes lately acquired in those parts, and taking a number of barbarians into our pay…(VI.90).[133]

It could be - and admittedly, this is speculation, that the oration is actually referring to Alcibiades when it refers to "these men who received more praise for prudence and virtue from the very enemies who fought them than other men receive from their friends" (243a). It could be that the oration alludes to the Lacedaemonians' willingness to be guided in Sicily by Alcibiades, even though he was an Athenian, when his own city had forsaken him out of distrust. Indeed, this would be an implicit praise of his "prudence" as concerns strategy, and an implicit exhibit of trust in his sincerity. By contrast, the Athenians gave him neither praise nor trust; indeed they had by this time sentenced him to death. Further to this theory, during the period in question, he, of all men, most exemplifies the idea of receiving praise from those who had been enemies. And, in having acquired the trust of his former enemies, and thus having acquired some influence among them, he could be seen as having "received more praise for prudence and for virtue … that other men receive from their friends" (243ab). Indeed, most men are not very influential even in their own cities, much less amongst their city's enemies. Now, it could be argued that Alcibiades was indeed culpable for his oligarchic sympathies, and may even have been guilty of the impieties for which he was accused. Nonetheless, the Athenians lost a real military asset in

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[132] See Thucydides, VI 27-28; 53; 60-61.

[133] Alcibiades' account must be interpreted cautiously in view of his political circumstances at this point. He would have had reason to exaggerate Athens' intentions to the Lacedaemonians.

Alcibiades, and what's worse, he aided the enemy. In a way, he exemplifies Athens' internal discord. Although he was willing to fight on behalf of Athens' democracy, and would assist her again in the future, Athens as a city had failed to inculcate a sense of civic loyalty within him – and this can, in part, be traced to the ongoing tension between those who were sympathetic to oligarchy and those who favored democracy in the city. The presence of two competing factions in the city can be expected to yield men who are unpredictable, and who consequently pose a threat to the city's well being – the city is factious, as are the souls of her most promising sons. A man like Alcibiades, noteworthy for his ambition and ability, may easily become disenchanted with a democracy that does not consistently show him the honor and gratitude he believes he deserves. Naturally, such a man intuits an oligarchy might be more to his taste. The oration's efforts to redefine the Athenian democracy, transforming her into an aristocratic democracy may be the best solution to this perpetual problem. If successful, men would honor moderation and thus "honor-lovers" (such as like Alcibiades and Cleon) would be encouraged to exhibit moderation. The oration's emphasis upon a single criterion for rule, that "he who is deemed to be wise or good has authority and rules", has the potential to satisfy the competitive spirit of an Alcibiades, who believes himself capable of the greatest exploits, yet disdains having to compete before the multitude, his inferiors, for the "honor" of rule. If such a man could be persuaded that the multitude in fact chose the best, he would not doubt that they would choose him, and in return he would be willing to serve such a city. As it is, his perception of the comparative ignorance (not to mention whimsical nature of the multitude) compels him to disdain the very city he is supposed to feel unqualified allegiance towards. Although there is no perfect solution to this problem, the oration suggests that a city unified in its opinion about the best regime (namely aristocratic democracy) whose citizens (Alcibiades included) believe that "the best" are selected to rule, with a citizenry successfully tempered by a tradition of moderation, is the best of all possible alternatives. However, the question becomes, what is the larger end in light of which such a judgement can be made? Is the primary concern the ascendance and fulfillment of men like Alcibiades? Or, is the regime aimed at providing a reasonably wholesome life for the multitude? Are these ends mutually exclusive, or can they be reconciled to our satisfaction by the regime laid-out in the oration? In retrospect, we can see that Socrates alerted us to the enormity of the *Menexenus*' subject matter in the opening exchange, when he asked Menexenus:

> What in particular drew you to the council chamber? Or is it clear that you believe you have come to the end of education and philosophy, and, supposing yourself sufficiently prepared, are you intending to turn to greater things? (234a)

The irony, the enormity, and pertinence of this question is now evident. In selecting a funeral oration, the city selects for itself a civic education. A civic education necessarily embodies, albeit in an imperfect and limited way, the answer to the question of what the best way of life is for human beings – and the options are well represented by the various distinctions alluded to in the oration. Which is the best way of life? Greek or barbarian, Spartan or Athenian? Or some synthesis? Attending the council chamber and selecting the "best" oration presupposes an answer to this primary question. However, properly answering such a question requires devoting one's life to philosophy, not to politics.

Closing Remarks

If nothing else, I hope my examination of the *Menexenus* has shown why the dialogue deserves to be treated as more than a mere comedy, or satire of rhetoricians. Rather, it addresses some of the most serious political questions and its comic elements are part of its disguise. What could be more controversial, not to mention dangerous, than praising Sparta to Athens? Moreover, openly praising Sparta could not be expected to achieve the reform of Athens that the Socratic oration intends. The internal harmony of the city requires a common understanding of citizenship and Greekness. Explicitly to praise Sparta to Athens would only inflame and divide an already factious city. By providing a civic education that merely portrays Spartanesque behavior as Athenian, Socrates achieves his reform without violating his own precept of civic reconciliation. The oration's emphasis on moderation, in the form of the merciful treatment of Athens' Greek enemies, as well as the explicit exaltation of moderation in 'the exhortation' work together to reform the city and the man by giving a consistent education to each. By contrast, the imperial Athens of history inculcated in her citizens immoderate political aspirations that became manifest in the internal turmoil that the oration bids us to see in a peculiar light – that is, as Athens defeating herself (243de). Equally puzzling is the oration's assertion that Athens' was "too given to pity and a servant of the weak" (245a). Perhaps some speculation is in order. These two comments, considered in connection with one another, suggest a possible explanation for Athens' internal discord (beyond "envy" that is). Namely, Athens was not the aristocratic democracy the oration contends, but rather, she was an imperial "tyranny" that in fact served the lower parts of her civic soul – her avarice and her vain pride. Insofar as Plato might wish us to see this service as Athens' weakness, that is, her inability to tame these lower ambitions in favor of a genuine pursuit of moderation and thus virtue, she was "weak" and can be understood as serving the "weak" – her own weakness.

In retrospect, Plato's characterization of Aspasia as a muse-like figure may have been our first indication that things are not as they initially seem with respect to Aspasia's authorship. Likening her to the muses actually implies that her status as the author of the oration parallels the poets' equally questionable claims to have been inspired (and personally coached) by the muses. Having noted the mythical character of the oration's alleged author, it is no stretch to see the oration's version of the *Republic's* 'noble lie' (and all that follows from it) as a revision of Athens' traditional understanding of herself as she received it from the poets. The Platonic Socrates' version of Athens' history is akin to his political philosophy as we receive elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, and especially in the *Republic's* 'city in *logos*'. Interestingly, the oration's implicit praise of Sparta along side its links to the 'city in *logos*' reveal that Sparta may have actually inspired some of the characteristics of the 'city in *logos*'.

A further aspect of Athens' reform is its novel education for women. Their prime role at funerals had been to wail and thereby express their grief. This is an emphatically passionate, and in that sense, somewhat immoderate reaction to loss. Aspasia's (indirect) presence in the dialogue is a recasting of women's traditional behavior heretofore in the Athenian regime. Aspasia's alleged composition of the oration invites Plato's readers to reconsider whether "wailing" and "mourning" at funerals is all that women can be expected to contribute to the pubic life of their city. One also suspects that the oration means to re-educate women (and thus mothers) toward a moderation that will accord with that of their male counterparts, thus acting together as parents they will then institute the new regime (insofar as it is ever instituted anywhere) by so educating their children.

Of course, I do not wish to suggest that Plato had high hopes for reforming the historical Athens, however, any improvement along these lines would likely be welcomed. Nevertheless, this is far too parochial an aim for Plato, or for political philosophy generally. Rather, in the *Menexenus* Plato has prepared a blueprint for any democracy that wishes to temper the lower parts of its civic soul. Therefore, its implicit precepts concerning the need to cultivate moderation (in the souls of her citizens and thus in the city generally) are as useful to us as they might have been to the historical Athens.

A few words about the "barbarian threat" are in order. I do not think that this reading of the *Menexenus* has granted this issue the time or consideration it deserves - but that would be an even longer road. It seems apparent to me, however, that in light of the *Republic's* presentation of the "barbaric bog" as that which prevents dialectic (along with the recognition that very few genuinely and continually strive to be dialectical) we must conclude that barbarism threatens all souls at all times. The *Menexenus*, as an articulation of the *origin* of the Greek way of life (as Plato understood it) points toward a timeless and universally applicable understanding of Greekness. And again, "Greekness", like the "barbaric threat", could be read as referring to particular qualities of soul, arising from a particular kind of nurture: a nurture that cultivates (at the least) moderation together with the desire to be deemed wise and good. The competition for such a distinction may well habituate a great many men to respect human wisdom above other more readily apparent qualities. And their quest to assess other men's wisdom may even nudge some toward a deeper appreciation for, and willingness to engage in, the dialectical pursuit of wisdom. My studies have led me to suspect that a more thorough reading of the *Menexenus* would actually reveal a clearer description of that other battle that is of no small importance to Plato. That is, the human soul's continuing battle against the "barbaric bog".

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[1] The following is Herodotus' account of Cambyses' rule:

> (30) And now Cambyses, who even before had not been quite in his right mind, was forthwith, as the Egyptians say, smitten with madness for his crime. The first of his outrages was the slaying of Smerdis, his full brother, whom he had sent back to Persia from Egypt out of envy, because he drew the bow brought from the Ethiopians by the Icthyophagi (which none of the other Persians were able to bend) the distance of two fingers' breadth. When Smerdis was departed into Persia, Cambyses had a vision in his sleep – he thought a messenger from Persia came to him with tidings that Smerdis sat upon the royal throne, and with his head touched the heavens. Fearing therefore for himself, and thinking it likely that his brother would kill him, and rule in his stead, Cambyses sent into Persia Prexaspes, who he trusted beyond all the other Persians, bidding him put Smerdis to death. So this Prexaspes went up to Susa and slew Smerdis. Some say he killed him as they hunted together, others, that he took him down to the Erythraean Sea, and there drowned him.
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> (31) This, it is said, was the first outrage which Cambyses committed. The second was the slaying of his sister, who had accompanied him into Egypt, and lived with him as his wife, though she was his full sister, the daughter both of his father and his mother. The way wherein he had made her his wife was the following: - It was not the custom of the Persians, before his time, to marry their sisters – but Cambyses, happening to fall in love with one of his, and wishing to take her to wife, as he knew that it was an uncommon thing, called together the royal judges, and put it to them. "whether there was any law which allowed a brother, if he wished, to marry his sister?" now the royal judges are certain picked men among the Persians, who hold their office for life, or until they are found guilty of some misconduct. By them justice is administered in

Persia, and they are interpreters of the old laws, all disputes being referred to their decision. When Cambyses, therefore, put his question to these judges, they gave him an answer which was at once true and safe – "they did not find any law," they said, "allowing a brother to take his sister to wife, but they found a law, that the king of the Persians might do whatever he pleased." And so they neither warped the law through fear of Cambyses, nor ruined themselves by over stiffly maintaining the law; but they brought another quite distinct law to the king's help, which allowed him to have his wish. Cambyses, therefore, married the object of this love, and no long time afterwards he took to wife another sister. It was the younger of these who went with him into Egypt, and there suffered death at his hands.

(32) Concerning the manner of her death, as concerning that of Smerdis, two different accounts are given. The story which the Greeks tell, is, that Cambyses had set a young dog to fight the cub of a lioness – his wife looking on at the time. Now the dog was getting the worse, when a pup of the same litter broke his chain, and came to his brother's aid – then the two dogs together fought the lion, and conquered him. The thing greatly pleased Cambyses, but his sister who was sitting by shed tears. When Cambyses saw this, he asked her why she wept: whereon she told him, that seeing the young dog come to his brother's aid made her think of Smerdis, whom there was none to help. For this speech, the Greeks say, Cambyses put her to death. But the Egyptians tell the story thus: - The two were sitting at table, when the sister took a lettuce, and stripping the leaves off, asked her brother "when he thought the lettuce looked the prettiest – when it had all its leaves on, or now that it was stripped?" He answered, "When the leaves were on." "But thou, " she rejoined, "hast done as I did to the lettuce, and made bare the house of Cyrus." Then Cambyses was wroth, and sprang fiercely upon her, though she was with child at the time. And so it came to pass that she miscarried and died.

(33) Thus mad was Cambyses upon his own kindred, and this either from his usage of Apis, or from some

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> other among the many causes from which calamities are wont to arise… (III.30-33).

[11] Sphacteria is an island near Pylos. There, the Athenians defeated the Peloponnesian fleet in 425 BC. Although the oration makes only a brief explicit reference to it, it was a remarkable battle for a variety of reasons, some of which may implicitly connect the event to the oration's broader themes. The first is that Demosthenes encouraged the fortification of Pylos, as opposed to other points on the Peloponnese because he:

> … thought that this place was distinguished from others of the kind by having a harbor close by; and Messenians, the old natives of the country, speaking the same dialect as the Lacedaemonians, could do them the greatest mischief by their incursions from it, and would at the same time be a trusty garrison (IV.3).

Thus, the affair at Pylos is premised upon Demosthenes' wish to exploit the ancient political divisions that existed in the Peloponnese. This point is relevant to the oration's mention of "Sphacteria" precisely because it is cited as evidence that the Athenians prevailed in a Greece "divided by rebellion and subduing the foremost of the other Greeks, they proved victorious on their own over those with whom they had once united to conquer the Barbarian" (242e). The oration makes the Athenians sound like they prevailed *despite* the fact that Greece was divided by rebellion, but according to Thucydides this attack was an Athenian attempt to encourage rebellion and division in the Peloponnese by exploiting the long existing hostility between the Messenians and their Spartan conquerors.

Thucydides' account of the battle itself is one of the most riveting of his whole work. It is particularly notable in the context of the *Menexenus* inasmuch as it provides a succinct metaphorical illustration of how the both the Athenians and the Spartans diverged from their traditional ways as a consequence of the war they waged against one and other. This is relevant to the theme of "origins" that was noted above – the Athenians and the Spartans as "peoples", changed as a consequence of the war. The oration will later make this point explicit when it refers to Athens' altered foreign policy. As I will try to show, her altered foreign policy actually makes her adopt a more Spartan stance, just as Thucydides' portrayal of the battle at Pylos shows Athens and Sparta adopting each other's military practices:

> Great was the melee, and quite in contradiction to the naval tactics usual to the two combatants, the

> Lacedaemonians in their excitement and dismay actually engaged in a sea-fight on land, which the victorious Athenians, in their eagerness to push their success as far as possible, were carrying on a land-fight from their ships. After great exertions and numerous wounds on both sides they separated, the Lacedaemonians saving their empty ships, except those first taken; and both parties returning to their camps, the Athenians set up a trophy, gave back the dead, secured the wrecks, and at once began to cruise round and jealously watch the island with its intercepted garrison, while the Peloponnesians on the mainland, whose contingents had now all come up, stayed where they were before Pylos … they determined, with the consent of the Athenians generals, to conclude an armistice at Pylos and send envoys to Athens to obtain a convention, and to endeavor to get back their men as quickly as possible (Thucydides,IV.14-15).

In the speech that follows, Sparta unsuccessfully attempts to elicit the mercy that the oration suggests the Athenians freely bestowed. Because of its pertinence to the *Menexenus*, I shall reproduce it in full, the italicized portions are those that emphasize the disguised criticisms the Lacedaemonians level at the Athenians, practically all of which are later proven true, and all of which Plato omits mention of in the *Menexenus*. Although one might expect the Spartans to praise Athens in a rhetorical effort to secure the men, they do not do so, with the sole exception of calling the Athenians' "intelligent judges". Indeed, the speech attributes the Athenian victory to *chance* rather than to skill, and practically insults her by hinting at her immoderate habits:

> Athenians, the Lacedaemonians sent us to try to find some way of settling the affair of our men on the island that shall be at once satisfactory to your interests, and as consistent with our dignity in our misfortune as circumstances permit. We can venture to speak at some length without any departure from the habit of our country. Men of few words where many are not wanted, we can be less brief when there is a matter of importance to be illustrated and an end to be served by its illustration. Meanwhile we beg you to take what we may say, not in a hostile spirit, nor as if we thought you ignorant and wished to lecture you, but rather as a suggestion on the best course to be taken *addressed*

to intelligent judges. You can now, if you choose, employ your present success to advantage, so as to keep what you have got and gain honour and reputation besides, and you can avoid the mistake of those who meet with an extraordinary piece of good fortune, and are led on by hope to grasp continually at something further, through having already succeeded without expecting it. But those who have known most *vicissitudes of good and bad* have also justly least faith in their prosperity; and to teach your city and ours this lesson experience has not been wanting. [18] To be convinced of this you have only to look at our present misfortune. What power in Hellas stood higher than we did? And yet we are come to you, although we formerly thought ourselves more able to grant what we are now here to ask. Nevertheless, we have not been brought to this by any decay in our power, or through having our heads turned by aggrandizement; no, our resources are what they have always been, and our error has been an error of judgement, to which all are equally liable. Accordingly the prosperity which your city now enjoys, and the accession that it has lately received, *must not make you fancy that fortune will be always with you*. Indeed sensible men are prudent enough to treat their gains as precarious, just as they would also keep a clear head in adversity, and think that war, so far from staying within the limit to which a combatant may wish to confine it will run the course that its chances prescribe; and thus, not being puffed up to grief, and most ready to make peace, if they can, while their *fortune* lasts. This, Athenians, you have a good opportunity to do now with us, and thus to escape the possible disasters which may follow upon your refusal, and the consequent imputation of *having owed to accident even your present advantages*, when you might have left behind you a reputation for power and wisdom which nothing could endanger. [19] The Lacedaemonians accordingly invite you to make a treaty and to end the war, and offer peace and alliance and the most friendly and intimate relations in every way and on every occasion between us; and in return they ask for the men on the island, thinking it better for both parties not to stand out to the end, on the *chance* of

> so favorable accident enabling the men to force their way out, or of their being compelled to succumb under the pressure of blockade. Indeed if great enmities are ever to be really settled, we think it will be not by the system of revenge and military success, and by forcing an opponent to swear to a treaty to his disadvantage, but when the more fortunate combatant waives these his privileges to be guided by gentler feelings, conquers his rival in generosity, and accords peace on more moderate conditions than he expected. From that moment, instead of the debt of revenge which violence must entail, his adversary owes a debt of generosity to be paid in kind, and is inclined by honor to stand to his agreement. And men oftener act in this manner towards their greatest enemies than where the quarrel is of less importance. They are also by nature as glad to give way to those who first yield to them, as they are apt to be provoked by arrogance to risks condemned by their own judgement. [20] To apply this to ourselves: if peace was ever desirable for both parties, it is surely so at the present moment, before anything irremediable befall between us and force us to hate you eternally, personally as well as politically, and you to miss the advantages that we now offer you. While the issue is still in doubt, and you have reputation and our friendship in prospect, and we the compromise of *our misfortune* before anything fatal occur, let us be reconciled, and for ourselves choose peace instead of war, and grant to the rest of the Hellenes a remission from their sufferings, for which be sure they will think they know not which began, but the peace that concludes it, as it depends on your decision, will by their gratitude be laid to your door. By such a decision you can become firm friends with the Lacedaemonians at their own invitation, which you do not force from them, but oblige them by accepting. And from this friendship consider the advantages that are likely to follow. When Athens and Sparta are at one, the rest of Hellas, be sure, will remain in respectful inferiority before its heads (Thucydides, IV,17-20).

As for being "intelligent" judges, Thucydides tells us (in the first person) that "the Athenians, however, having the men on the island, thought that the treaty would be ready for them whenever they chose to make it, *and grasped at something further*". Thus, at least as far as the Spartans are concerned, and possibly Thucydides concurs, the Athenians did not turn out to be "intelligent judges'. The Athenians made their decision at the urging of Cleon, son of Cleaenetus, who persuaded the Athenians to impose harsh conditions upon the Spartans, and when the Spartan envoy in turn requested private negotiations, Cleon "violently assailed" them for their dishonesty. Thucydides does little to hide his distaste for Cleon, elsewhere telling us that even his own troops began seriously to "reflect on the weakness and incompetence of their commander"(V.7). Not only does his prominence in Athens call into question whether the multitude were "intelligent judges", but it also calls into question the oration's assertion that "though the multitude has control over most of the city's affairs, they give the ruling offices and authority to those who are consistently *deemed to be best*".(6) Although the oration does not actually lie, it is true the multitude must have *deemed* Cleon to be best, but it is hard to believe that either Socrates or Plato believed in this case that she was right. It was only after Delium, where Cleon's poor judgment cost both his life and the Athenians' a disastrous defeat did the Athenians relent and seriously begin negotiating the return of the Spartans that were captured on the island (V.15).

It is possible that the oration actually concurs with the appraisal of the situation that the Spartans offered. The first event that the oration addresses after "Sphacteria" tells us how Athens, being unsuccessful in Sicily on behalf of the Leontinians, came to her own "misfortune", which was just as the Spartan envoy predicted. In fact, she was in a situation strikingly parallel to the situation the Spartans were formerly in at Sphacteria. In June of 415 B.C., with Athens' ships sailing around Sicily engaging in various battles, Thucydides tells us "the length of their voyage became a problem for our city and left her unable to aid them, they gave up and fell into *misfortune*". Thus, the Spartan envoys proved correct, and eventually Athens herself suffered misfortune. Moreover, she was now in the like position of having ships in a vulnerable position on an island, making "Sicily" for the Athenians what "Sphacteria" was for the Spartans.

What the oration lightly refers to as a "misfortune" was actually an unspeakably disastrous event that far outweighed Sphacteria for the Spartans. In September of 413 B.C. the Sicilian expedition came to an end when 40,000 Athenians surrendered to the Syracusans, who slaughtered thousands on the spot and worked the rest to death as quarry slaves (Thucydides, Books 6-7). But here we may detect a difference between how Greeks ought to behave if they are to accord with the precepts of the oration, and how some in fact did behave. That is, insofar as Athens did eventually return some of her Spartan captives (that is to say Greek captives) alive, she may be seen as somewhat moderate toward her Greek enemies, and therefore acting in accordance with the oration's claim:

> they [the Athenians] believed that whereas they ought to wage war against the barbarians all the way to destruction, they should fight those of their own race only to the point of victory(242d).

On the other hand, all those Athenians who were caught in Sicily perished at the hands of the Syracusans – who were themselves Greek colonists. In this light then, the Syracusans become prime examples of Greeks who would fight other Greeks all the way to destruction.

Indeed, in the *Seventh Letter*, Plato, from his own experience of the place, describes Syracuse as an environment that is practically the antithesis to the oration's emphasis on moderation:

> When I arrived I found nothing whatever to please me in the tastes of a society devoted to Italian and Syracusan cookery, where happiness was held to consist in filling oneself full twice a day, never sleeping alone at night, and indulging in the other pursuits that go with such a way of living … Such a state will must inevitably be involved in a never-ending round of revolution – it will be by turns a despotism, an oligarchy and a democracy – and those who hold power in it will not endure to hear a just and fair constitution so much as mentioned (page116).

Plato's emphasis upon a connection between citizens' personal self-indulgence and a regime's vulnerability to despotic rule supports my thesis regarding the *Menexenus*' oration being directed at tempering the souls of the citizens and in so doing, laying the foundations for a more moderate regime.

[iii] With respect to the Greek / Barbarian distinction, it may be useful to consider its treatment in the *Republic* as a background to its appearance in the *Menexenus*. There, the first reference to Barbarians appears in the context of a discussion between Socrates and Adeimantus about cities, and specifically about what constitutes the weakness of most, and perhaps all cities. That is, most cities are not properly referred to as *single* cities, but rather, as *many* cities because most, if not all, so-called cities contain within them potential factions which may be exploited by an

enemy. In these divided cities there are at least two "warring with each other, one of the poor, the other of the rich. And within each of these there are very many" (*Rep.*423a). By appealing to the desires of either one of these separate parts, they can be inspired to ally with outside forces. The city that Socrates and Adeimantus have thus far arranged does not contain this flaw:

> And as long as your city is moderately governed in the way it was just arranged, it will be biggest, I do not mean in the sense of good reputation but truly biggest … You'll not easily find one city so big as this, either among the Greeks or the barbarians, although many seem to be many times its size (423a-b).

Thus the *Republic's* story of the distinction between the Greeks and barbarians seems to begin not with the revelation of a clear difference between the two groups, but instead with their shared deficiency. They are alike in the sense that neither the Greeks nor the barbarians can produce cities that are governed "in the way it was just arranged", and as such their cities share a common vulnerability. Quite possibly all cities everywhere share this imperfection, and in the final analysis perhaps the only intelligible application of this sort of moderate rule will be in some few souls – but this is jumping ahead.

It is rather surprising that we are not lead to disdain out of hand the barbarians for either tyrannical rule, or for uncivilized ways in comparison to those of the Greeks. Instead, we are lead to recognize that they are *alike* in their inability to produce moderately ruled cities. This is not to say there are not better and worse cities, or "Greek" cities worthy of defense on the basis of their greater participation in what would actually constitute a "good" or perfectly just city.

Speaking now with Glaukon in Book V, Socrates prods:

> But since we've begun to speak, we must make our way to the rough part of the law, begging these men, not to mind their own business, but to be serious; and reminding them that it is not so long ago that it seemed shameful and ridiculous to the Greeks – as it does now to the many among the barbarians – to see men naked; and that when the Cretans originated the gymnasiums, and the Lacedaemonians, it was possible for the urbane of the time to make a comedy of all that. Or don't you suppose so?"
> "I do" (452c).

Here again, rather than pointing out an obvious difference between the two we are reminded that the Greeks once held the same beliefs as the Barbarians presently do on at least this point. The suggestion that the Greeks have not always held their present view makes clear that we may be dealing only in convention here; and that said, convention is prone to change and manipulation by those who create the images on the wall of the cave. But here we must question whether this difference in opinion offers any insight into a truly radical distinction between the Greeks and the Barbarians as peoples or races. If the Greeks used to hold the same beliefs on this subject, and have come to see it a different way, then there is no reason to believe the barbarians could not do the same, especially with continued exposure to the Greeks – or, for that matter, the reverse could be true. So far, the tale of the Greeks and the barbarians does not seem to shed much light on the differences, but rather, these two examples point to basic similarities. That is, the difference between the Greeks and the Barbarians in these things are not intrinsic differences, rather, they are conventional and particularized.

The next mention of the barbarians in the *Republic* is in the context of how the city in speech ought to conduct its foreign affairs, and here we may detect an ominous warning about the potential threat the barbarians pose:

> First, as to enslavement; which seem just, that Greek cities enslave Greeks, or that they, insofar as possible, not even allow another city to do it but make it a habit to spare the Greek stock, well aware of the danger of enslavement at the hands of the barbarians? … that they not themselves possess a Greek as a slave, and give the same advice to other Greeks … At any rate in that way they would be more inclined to turn to the barbarians and keep off one and other (469c-d).

The mention of "Greek stock", conjures images of breeding and thus suggests that a real physical/genetic difference exists between the Greeks and the barbarians. More importantly this difference is politically relevant insofar as it should be observed both to guide policy amongst the Greeks as well as serve as a point of union to the Greeks in a sort of quasi-nationalism directed against the barbarians. But we are given no explicit reason for why this distinction on the basis of "stock", or what could be interpreted to mean "race", is justifiable. One could make the case that the Greek city state is quite simply a superior way of life in comparison to existing as a part of the Persian empire. However, this argument does not rely on mere race; rather, it appeals to a different conception of the best way of life and as such to a standard of the "good" which need not observe racial distinctions at all – which is to say it would be the best possible life for anyone of any given race. One would assume a universal good to be universally applicable. It could be that the Greek conception of the good life was distinct and superior to that of the barbarians, and that this is the real basis of "Greek" superiority; nurture, not nature. Must we not conclude then that this is a chance correlation of race and opinion, as opposed to a necessary causal relationship?

And if it is only the former, then the foreign policy outlined during this passage of the *Republic* appears quite parochial. And yet it is difficult to swallow the latter, simply on the basis of what is quoted earlier: the Greeks once held at least some of the *same* opinions as the barbarians. Could not then the barbarians come to hold the same opinions as the Greeks?

If one were to read this same passage as alluding to more than a literal reference to Greeks and barbarians as different races, however, some of these difficulties can be resolve. If it turns out to be a quality of the soul that Socrates is referring to when he speaks of Greeks and barbarians, then the passage no longer seems parochial, but instead it becomes eternally relevant. Moreover, "stock" could be a reference to all those who possess a special kind of soul, as opposed to a particular biological race, and then it would be possible to maintain a necessary causal relationship between "Greek" or "Barbarian" stock and a particular conception of the best way of life. Certain souls would be amenable to the recognition of the truly best way of life – these souls would then constitute the Greek stock regardless of their particular race. In this way, it makes perfect sense to have a policy of refraining from enslaving others of Greek stock as it were, particularly if you yourself were a Greek. True Greeks would presumably be those most fit to practice self-rule. To enslave such men would be an injustice. Regarded in this light, the Greek/barbarian distinction is not easily applied to cities – except perhaps those 'in speech'. Rather, it is more applicable to individual human beings. If this is the case, one suspects that the Greeks will always be few in number, but "bigger" nonetheless (Cf. *Menexenus*, 241ab).

Following the discussion of sparing the Greek stock and uniting to fight the barbarians, we are told Socrates inquires:

> When they [their soldiers] win is it a fine practice to strip the dead of anything more than their arms? Or doesn't it provide a pretext for cowards not to attack the man who's still fighting, as though they were doing something necessary in poking around the dead, while many an army before now has been lost as a consequence of this plundering? (469d)

In effect, these Greek soldiers are to moderate their greed for possessions. Socrates then draws a distinction between war and faction – faction being the hatred of one's own and war the hatred of what is alien: "the Greek stock is with respect to itself its own and akin, with respect to the barbaric, foreign and alien" (470c). War is then called the hatred of what is alien, *that* apparently being whatever is barbaric. This theme is of course present in the *Menexenus*, where Socrates, during his recitation of the oration, asserts, "As you well know, the nobility and freedom of our city are this firm and sound and we are by nature Barbarian –hating because, unmixed with Barbarians, we are purely Greek" (245 cd). Taken literally, these comments seem to have a tenuous relationship with the historical conduct of both Athens and other Greek cities. For instance, during the war there were a variety of appeals made to the Persian King for assistance; indeed, he helped Lacedaemon improve its navy.

The next appearance of "barbarian" is a rather enigmatic reference to location:

> Therefore, if in the endless time that has gone by, there has been some necessity for those who are on the peaks of philosophy to take charge of a city, or there even now is such a necessity in some barbaric place somewhere far outside of our range of vision, or will be later, in this case we are ready to do battle for the argument that the regime spoken of has been, is, and will be when this Muse has become master of the city (490d).

Now, one could choose to interpret this "barbaric place" literally – as if they mean to leave open the possibility that there is a barbaric place that exists, presently unbeknownst to them, where those on the peaks of philosophy may take charge out of necessity. This however, is a less than satisfying explanation. If we read it as if all places are predominately barbaric because most souls are predominately barbaric, then we arrive at a more promising interpretation of the above passage. This interpretation is supported by the next mention of the barbarians, or more precisely, the phrase "the barbaric bog". The context is now the dialectical way of inquiry and Socrates asserts:

> …only the dialectical way of inquiry proceeds in this direction, destroying the hypotheses, to the beginning itself in order to make it secure; and when the eye of the soul is really buried in a barbaric bog, dialectic gently draws it forth and

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> leads it up above, using the arts we described as assistants and helpers in the turning around (533d).

Dialectic gently leads the soul out of the *barbaric* bog – which is to say, beyond the realm of opinion. This "barbaric bog" may well be the "barbaric place …outside our range of vision" to which Socrates referred in the above quote, and this place is here explicitly said to be located in the soul. Thus, it would seem that everyone, insofar as they dwell in the realm of opinion, is barbaric. Shortly afterward, Socrates himself states: "Thought was, I believe, the word by which we previously distinguished it. But, *in my opinion,* there is no place for dispute about a name when a consideration is about things so great as those lying before us" (533d). Perhaps them, one only ceases to be barbaric when one has, through dialectic, transcended the realm of opinion and arrived at an understanding of what *is* – however brief this encounter with intellection may be.

Now, what implications does this examination suggest for the *Menexenus*? First, it is probably justifiable to suspect that there, or in the *Republic*, references to the "Greeks" and the "barbarians" are not necessarily as they seem. They may in fact be subtle references to different sorts of souls as opposed to different ethnic groups. Indeed, is there any other explanation for the category of people that are "Greeks by convention but Barbarians by nature"? If a people display all the conventional aspects of "Greekness", then the basis of distinguishing them as "Barbarians by nature" *must* lie somewhere outside of their easily observable behavior. Must he not be referring to qualities of the soul when he speaks of "nature"? Those aspects of their souls that have not been transformed to "Greek" by Greek conventions?

At 490d, (quoted above) there is mention that "the regime they have spoken of" will be when the Muse is the master of the city – this is the way by which those on the peaks of philosophy might rule. I argued in Chapter IV, that the Platonic Aspasia is a Muse-like figure, and if so, then the oration can be regarded as a product of the Muses. In this connection, the contention that the city (the 'city in logos') will not come into being until the *Muse* is its master further supports my thesis that the oration is actually an effort to revise the Athenians' self-understanding in a manner that adheres (to a practically limited extent) to the policies prescribed for the *Republic*'s 'city in *logos*'.

[ii] If one is persuaded that Socrates chose not to give the most effective defense he could in the *Apology*, which seems clear since much of his speech defense there is offensive in nature and could be expected to inflame the jurors rather than extract their sympathy

for his way of life, then he can be seen as having chosen " to die nobly".

At the beginning of the 'exhortation', the oration, which we are supposed to hear as if it were coming from the mouths of the fallen men, claims:

> For we believe that life is not worth living for the one who brings shame upon his own, and that such a man will find no friend among either human beings or gods, neither on the earth nor under it once he has died (246d).

Since Socrates' trial occurred during the period the oration covers, and the oration explicitly honors those who died at one and other's hands, Socrates can be included along with the other fallen Athenians, who we are to believe the 'exhortation' issues from. This portion of the oration seems to have Socrates' fingerprints all over it. For instance, in the *Apology*, Socrates says something very similar to that which is quoted above: "the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being" (38a). Although they differ slightly, the two statements can easily be reconciled if we see read 'shame' as the just consequence of living an unexamined life.

' With respect to the theme of "playing" as it appears in the opening exchange, it is made all the richer if we consider for a moment the action of the *Lysis*. There, Socrates tells us: "Menexenus, in the middle of his playing, entered from the courtyard, and when he saw me and Ctesippus, he came to sit down beside us" (*Lys*.207b). Interpreted metaphorically, Menexenus interrupted his childhood games to converse with the philosopher. Menexenus leaves their discussion only to partake, at the gymnastic master's behest, in "sacred rites". After his return, he, Lysis, and Socrates continue a discussion about "friendship" until they are interrupted by the boys' foreign attendants. Unable to persuade the attendants to allow the boys to remain with Socrates, the boys must leave. The last words uttered in the dialogue are from Socrates who says:

> Now, Lysis and Menexenus, we have become ridiculous – *I, an old man, and you*. For these fellows will say, as they go away, that we suppose we're friends – for I also put myself among you – but what he who is a friend is we have not yet been able to discover (*Lys*.223b).

This portion of the *Lysis* is the last glimpse Plato gives us of Socrates and Menexenus associating prior to the *Menexenus*.

Then, early in the *Menexenus*, the relative age of Socrates and Menexenus is again emphasized: "But perhaps you'll laugh at me *if I in my old age seem still to be playing*"(236c). If we interpret this latter reference to Socrates' old age as an echo of Socrates' parting words in the *Lysis*, then the Menexenus can be seen as a kind of extension of the relationship portrayed in the *Lysis*. If we consider Socrates words, "But perhaps you'll laugh at me if I in my old age seem still to be playing", in connection with the image of Menexenus as a young boy interrupting his play to converse with Socrates, we could see the *Menexenus* as beginning with a subtle reference to the closing of the *Lysis*

With respect to the theme of "play" and speech, the *Phaedrus* is replete with interesting material linking the two.

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